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THE ANGEL OF FORGIVENESS

BY

ROSA NOUCHETTE CAREY

AUTHOR OF 'NELLIE'S MEMORIES,' 'NO FRIEND LIKE A SISTER,' ETC.

God called the nearest angels who dwell with Him above ;
The tender one was Pity, and the dearest one was Love.
WHITTIER.

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CHAPTER I

MENTOR HANDS ME MY PEN

Describe humbly what you see and you cannot go wrong : describe what others have been taught to see and you cannot by any possibility be right.—JOHN OLIVER HOBBS.

My best friend said to me one day, 'Githa, you are rather an imaginative young woman, and in a feminine and amateurish way you have a pretty fancy and a tolerable knack of character-drawing ; why do you not beguile what you so improperly term the weary hours of captivity by writing your girlish reminiscences. I am quite serious,' as I stared at him, unable to believe the evidence of my own ears ; 'it will be good practice for you, and I do not doubt that some of your friends—your humble servant amongst the number—will find amusement in the perusal. After all,' rising from his chair as though to emphasise his remark, 'there is nothing so interesting as real life. Take my advice, my dear child ; it will be a far more healthy pastime than fretting over the doctor's orders,' and then Mentor gave me a reassuring nod and smile, and went out of the room, closing the door softly and humming his favourite little tune under his breath.

If he had wanted to rouse me from my grey mood of

cheerless despondency, he had certainly taken the best means of doing so. What a strange idea, and how impossible! and yet it somehow attracted me—it would pass the time during the long days and weeks that must be spent on my couch. How I loathed the prospect, and secretly rebelled against the verdict of my kind and careful physician, for I was only a beginner in the school of life, and had many a 'turned lesson' to learn over again.

How well I remember that afternoon, and the soft briskness of the October air. The window was open, but a bright little fire burnt on the hearth. There were still some roses peeping in, but the red and yellow leaves were pattering down fast on the gravel walks. A pleasant pungent smell of burning weeds now and then reached me. The stillness seemed to soothe my nerves, and as I gazed dreamily at the fire I said to myself, 'Why should I not do it?' for I knew well that dear friend of mine was generally right, and even if I failed—well, only a few torn sheets of paper would be the result; and then I rang the bell and asked Annie to bring me my writing-pad.

No, it was no use letting my good resolution cool. 'To-day does better work than half-a-dozen to-morrows,' as Nurse Marland used to say. I have a whole list of dear old Mardie's sayings copied out in a little black book. I used to read them out to father, and he would annotate them. I remember when I quoted the one I have just mentioned he repeated slowly, 'To-day does better work than half-a-dozen to-morrows. That's another version of "Strike when the iron's hot." Cooling iron needs the furnace again. Mardie is right, Gipsy; procrastination is a feeble sort of thing.'

It seems to me that my autographical sketches will be as straggly and untidy as my big portfolio of water-colour drawings which was consigned to the attic. I never could be precise and methodical in spite of all Mardie's and Miss Redford's efforts, and I must write in my own desultory way or lay down my pen for good and all.

A child's memory is not infallible, and imagination often embellishes it with glowing tints. A happy and healthy and well-protected childhood is spent in pleasant places not far removed from fairyland: one passes over a rainbow bridge to a wonderland, where grown-up people are always wise and can do no wrong. Giants walk the earth with pockets hard to reach, but which are always filled with sugar-plums—'sweeties,' one termed them. 'Will there be toy-shops in heaven, Fardie?' I remember asking my father, when I was a tiny mite, one Sunday evening. I had grown tired of the picture-books he was showing me, and wanted my doll, Mariana, who opened and shut her eyes at my bidding, and had lovely blue kid shoes; but Mardie, who was old-fashioned, had consigned Mariana to the toy cupboard until Monday morning.

'Toy-shops, you little heathen!' responded father good-humouredly, as I climbed on his knee and nestled against him. 'What put such an idea in your little head, Gipsy?—such a curly head, too,' smoothing it gently as he spoke. But I was not to be put off in that way; I shook off his hand impatiently and frowned.

'Mardie says that heaven is a happy place,' I continued, in rather a cross tone, 'and that all good little girls and boys will be happy too. I shall play for ever and ever, so I shall want heaps of toys, and kittens and rabbits, and dicky-birds and'—but my list

of heavenly requirements was cut ruthlessly short by a knock at the door and the usual formula, 'It is your bed-time, Miss Githa.' Alas! even in fairyland things were not perfect. To go to bed when one was not sleepy—well, any child had a right to protest and feel injured, but father, who was aware of my powers of argument, closed my lips with a hearty kiss.

'Good-night, my pet, I will come and see you before dinner, and if you are asleep I will save the kisses for to-morrow. Now trot along, my little love, don't keep Nurse Marland waiting,' and when father spoke in that tone I never ventured to rebel.

Father and Mardie and I lived in the big corner house in Cheyne Walk—St. Olave's Lodge, it was called. Dear old house, how I loved it, with its red-brick wall always smothered in Virginian creepers, and its shaded balcony, where one could sit and see the steamers passing on the river, and the wide embankment with its seats and trees! On summer evenings it was delightful to see the barges and steamboats laden with passengers, and to hear the washing of the water against the keel, as the swift propeller churned it into miniature waves.

Dear old St. Olave's! every brick was precious to me; but I never pass it now without a sigh. It has been altered and modernised and improved past recognition, in my opinion; and the plate-glass windows and grand new frontage do not compensate for such ruthless destruction of old associations. 'You must own, Gipsy, that it badly needed repair,' father would say when I complained to him. 'In our day we put up with things,' but I never would let him finish.

'It was the loveliest old house in the world,' I returned, 'before those Goths and Vandals worked

their will on it. What did the outside matter? the rooms inside were just perfect'; and though father shook his head at my vehemence, he did not contradict me.

I might be inclined to doubt my own youthful judgment and memory, but by a strange coincidence, a few days before this, a letter from my former governess, Miss Redford—only her name is not Redford now—had reached me touching on this very subject; but I will transcribe the whole passage. 'I was thinking of the old days rather soberly and tenderly, dear Githa, as I walked down Cheyne Walk the other day. No, you are right, one can hardly recognise St. Olave's Lodge, it is like seeing a young mask on an old face. In those days I used to think it the most charming old house I knew; on summer days, when the door opened, that wide, dimly-lighted hall was so cool and delightful, with its beautiful tessellated pavement and fine old staircase. And then the long drawing-room, a little faded and old-fashioned perhaps, hardly up to date in its hangings and decorations, and needing so urgently a woman's hand and eye to arrange details; too often flowerless vases and unwatered plants, and yet what a dear old homelike room it was! Do you remember, Githa, how often you begged to do afternoon lessons on the balcony, and more than once I was weak enough to give in to your childish wish; but the lessons were never properly studied, for every minute a shrill, excited little voice would exclaim, "Oh, do look, Miss Redford, at those barges laden with hay, how delightfully comfortable they must be; there is a little boy and a dog curled up at the end of one—oh, I do wish I could be with them," and so on through the hot, drowsy afternoon. No, certainly balcony studies were sad failures, for you were a restless child, Githa,

and your father's pet name Gipsy exactly suited you.'

I remember I laid down the letter with a smile, and took out a miniature that father had had painted when I was seven years old.

A little brown oval face, with big, serious dark eyes, which seemed to look straight into mine with an innocent questioning expression. Child Githa confronting woman Githa! Such solemn eyes, and such thick masses of wavy hair, dark brown, with here and there a ruddy light, and a mutinous, eager little mouth, ready at any moment to break into smiles. Pretty?—yes, I suppose so, or Mr. Cleveland, who was such a great artist, would not have begged so hard to paint me for his celebrated picture of Little Red Riding-Hood. How willingly father would have bought that picture, but it was not for sale. Aunt Cosie saw it when it was finished, and she told Miss Redford that it was charming, and would certainly be greatly admired. I believe a rich Australian had ordered it, to match a picture of his own little girl who was painted as Bo-peep.

I suppose every child thinks there is no man to compare with her own father, but to this day I honestly believe that my father, Philip Darnell, is the handsomest man in all my little circle of acquaintances. To my childish eyes he was simply perfect. He was tall and very strong and athletic-looking, and he held himself remarkably well. His features were good, and he had the kindest eyes in the world—they were dark blue, I discovered, and at times they were capable of a merry twinkle; but I was once much hurt in my childish feelings by overhearing a remark of our cook-housekeeper, Mrs. Kennedy, to Hallett our butler, which I foolishly

repeated to father. Children are not remarkable for tact, and it was that unlucky speech of mine which made father complain to Aunt Cosie that his little girl was too much with the servants. I heard afterwards that Aunt Cosie advised him to turn the nursery into a schoolroom, and to engage Miss Redford as my governess. Aunt Cosie was very friendly with the Redfords, and Claudia, the second sister, was a special chum of hers, and it was Claudia whom she suggested.

What a fuss and turmoil and upheaval of old customs, just on account of my harmless little speech!

'Father, dear,' I had said, as I sat on his knee in the gloaming. 'I heard Kenny say such a funny thing to Hallett. They did not know I was in the pantry, because it was rather dark, and Kenny spoke so loudly. "I don't suppose you would find a finer-looking man than the master, Mr. Hallett, in a day's march, so to speak. He walks with an air as much as to say, 'I am Philip Darnell the banker'—not that he is a bit proud really.'"

'What on earth are you talking about, Gipsy?' asked father, rousing himself from a brown study with difficulty.

'Oh, do let me finish, darling,' in an important voice. 'Kenny is such a wordy person.'

"Right you are, Mrs. Kennedy," observed Hallett. "If the master were a duke he could not carry himself better, and when he is on black Sultan's back I have seen folk turn their heads to look after him."

"I don't doubt the ladies admire him"—Kenny spoke in such a funny voice. "I often say to myself, Hallett, that the master must be a bit lonely with only that child to talk to him; there is a sad look in his eyes that makes my heart ache at whiles," and—oh, father, how you did startle me,' for father had

put me down suddenly from his knee, and was ringing the bell rather loudly.

'I have a letter to write, Githa, and it is past your bed-time, and I have no leisure to waste on such a chatter-box. Take her away, Mrs. Marland,' as nurse appeared; 'she deserves a whipping, but I doubt if she will get it.' He spoke in jest and kissed me, but why had he called me Githa in that stiff way, and started up so suddenly without taking any notice of my speech? I puzzled my childish head sorely over this when I got upstairs, and Mardie, who read me like an open book, soon coaxed me to tell her what was amiss with her lamb; but she shook her dear head once or twice during the recital. I was standing before her in my little night-dress before I had finished, and Mardie drew me comfortably on to her lap, and hugged me in a comforting manner.

'Don't give it a second thought, my pet; it stands to reason that the master must have his busy moments like other gentlemen, and with all his love for my precious, his time is too valuable to waste on talk.'

'Then you really think that he was in a hurry to write his letter and not making believe, Mardie?'

'The master never makes believe, dearie, except in play,' returned Mardie, stirring the fire a little noisily. 'I'll be bound he is at that letter now'; then, as the street door suddenly slammed, she coughed slightly, and went on in a ruminative manner.

'The master must have heaps of business on his shoulders, and when he comes home he wants to rest, and to have his little girl amuse him. If I were you, Miss Githa, I would not bother him with that sort of talk. Mrs. Kennedy and Mr. Hallett are excellent people in their way, but a gentleman like Mr. Darnell

would not care to hear their conversation. A still tongue and quick ears make no mischief. Pantry talk and drawing-room talk are mostly different. Now you are getting sleepy, my girlie ; say your prayers and nurse will tuck you up, and we'll have our hymn.' For until I was quite a big girl, my dear old nurse, who had a sweet, tuneful voice, was in the habit of singing to me a few verses of an evening hymn, 'Now the day is over'; and however sleepy I might be when I laid my head on my pillow, I always strove religiously to remain awake for my favourite verse :

Through the long night watches,
May Thine angels spread
Their white wings above me,
Watching round my bed.

'It must be like sleeping in a tent of feathers—snow-white feathers,' I once murmured drowsily, just before I sank into unconsciousness.

Father never made any allusion to my remarks ; but the next day he went to see Aunt Cosie, and stayed a long time ; and then Aunt Cosie paid us a visit in the nursery and told me that father was going to take me for a walk, and that I was to get ready, and not keep him waiting. I did not need any further injunction—a walk with father was one of my greatest treats. He always asked me where I should like to go, and if he thought I was tired he would take a hansom. On these occasions he was such a dear, merry companion, and sometimes we played famous games together. What I called 'the tramping game' was my favourite. We pretended to be two tramps, and Battersea Park was generally the scene of our pilgrimage. Father, who was a capital actor, would some-

times, in an unfrequented part, act the character so inimitably that I would shiver with sympathy, especially if the weather was cold and raw. His rather stately walk would change to a shabby, limping gait, and I was his little girl selling matches or laces. Of course, this game had its limitations, as father was unwilling to take passers-by into confidence; but in the dusk we kept it up as long as possible, though I don't mind confessing now that I often felt inclined to beg him to stop. 'You do look so very cold, and hungry, and miserable,' I said so piteously one day that he burst out laughing, and kissed me and called me a little goose. But he did it too well, and I had to shake myself to get rid of the notion that I was a shivering little match-girl who was presently going to sup on a saveloy and a hard crust under a dark arch not far from the river. No, I say again, father's play-acting was too dramatic and realistic for my enjoyment.

We had a charming walk, and that afternoon I was a lost princess, and he was a benevolent goatherd who rescued me and then turned into a prince, and it was such a pretty story, and father carried it out so well, that I was absorbed in it, and was only sorry when we reached home. I thought Mardie looked a little grave and out of sorts that evening, but she welcomed me with her usual affection, as though I had been absent for a month. But as we sat at tea she sighed more than once, and in conversation alluded to herself as an old woman—always a sign of low spirits with Mardie.

'But you are not really old,' I objected; 'at least father said so one day'; for of course, to my childish mind fifty-two was extreme old age.

'Begging your pardon, my lamb, I am a useless old woman—but there, the good Lord has not made



us all alike ; changes must come, and it is not my place to grumble if they that sit in authority over me see fit to make different arrangements. Don't sit staring at me with your pretty eyes ; eat your bread and honey, dearie, and tell your silly old Mardie that you will always love her.' And Mardie completed my mystification by taking my head between her hands, and kissing my curls with a passionate tenderness that astonished me. Poor dear Mardie, how could I guess that the prospect of the new schoolroom and governess was filling her soul with bitterness !

CHAPTER II

THE NEW GOVERNESS

It is thus in youth !
We play at leap-frog over the god Term ;
The love within us and the love without
Are mixed, confounded ; if we are loved or love,
We scarce distinguish : thus, with other power ;
Being acted on and acting seem the same :
In that first onrush of life's chariot-wheels,
We know not if the forests move or we.

E. B. BROWNING.

MARDIE had come to our house when I was about four years old, but she had never been in service before. She was a widow then, having lost her husband the previous year. He had been the captain of a small vessel connected with the Newfoundland fisheries, and one foggy night the smack grounded on an iceberg, and poor Captain Marland and all the crew were lost. For a cruel jag of ice had ripped up one side of the ill-fated vessel, and the waves washed from end to end of it, drowning the men as they strove to fight their way to the deck.

Mardie had only had one child, a boy, who died in infancy ; and during her husband's long absences she had lived with her parents. It was their death, following very shortly after her widowhood, and her

own exceeding loneliness, which induced her to become my nurse. My father greatly appreciated her, and both he and Aunt Cosie reposed entire confidence on her, and the household treated her with much respect. Mardie was a brisk, dark little woman with bright eyes and a neat figure; perhaps it was because her expression was so pleasant, but I seriously thought her beautiful, and more than once I told her so. I remember how she laughed until she nearly cried. 'I wish my dear old mother could have heard that,' she said once. 'Bless your innocent heart, Miss Githa; I was never bonnie even in my young days. "Handsome is as handsome does, Pollie," how well I remember mother saying that. Well, dearie, what is it?' for I was staring at her with all my might.

'Was your name Pollie?' I asked in an interested tone.

'Yes, Miss Githa—that is to say I was christened Mary Anne, but father and mother and Fergus always called me Pollie.'

I assured Mardie that it was a lovely name, and that I greatly preferred it to Mardie, but she changed the subject a little hurriedly by asking me if I should like to see a picture of her poor lost husband—'drowned dead,' as Mrs. Kennedy used to say of some luckless black kittens; and the next moment she offered reverently for my inspection a shabby black case containing a daguerreotype. I studied it intently. I thought the weather-beaten, florid face looked kind and good-tempered, and the brown whiskers and short curly beard appealed to my childish fancy. I assured Mardie breathlessly that her Fergus was a splendid man, and she kissed me and then the daguerreotype rather tearfully.

'Oh, how sorry you must have been to lose him, Mardie,' and Mardie gave me such a sad little smile.

'One can't talk of such things, dearie,' she returned, as she put away the sacred treasure in a safe place. 'And don't trouble your dear little heart, my pretty. God was very good and raised me up friends in my trouble, and you were such a comfort to me with your baby's ways; but there, if we live long enough we must all sup sorrow at times,' and Mardie roused herself and suggested that we should go out and get some Bath buns for tea, these being my favourite delicacies.

Mardie did not long fret over the contemplated change; she had far too much sense, and her love for me was too real and unselfish. A long talk with father soon put her right.

After all, the old nursery was not to be touched. Mardie would sit and sew there, and for the present, at least, the domestic authorities decided that we were still to have breakfast and tea there. Father was too busy with his letters and papers to be hindered by my childish chatter in the morning; but luncheon, which was really my dinner, was to be taken in the dining-room with my governess. A room on the other side of the passage, exactly opposite to the nursery, was to be turned into the schoolroom, and some nice new furniture was sent in; and Mardie, who took much interest in the arrangements and was very clever with her needle, made the pretty cretonne hangings and the neat coverings for the couch and easy-chairs.

'If you leave the door just ajar, Miss Githa,' she observed once, 'I shall be able to hear your dear voice quite plainly at your lessons'; but I interrupted her, for a sudden doubt was troubling me.

'I don't mind learning lessons,' I returned, 'and I

will say them as loudly as possible, but I want to know, Mardie, if we shall have our nice morning walks together,' but to my dismay nurse shook her head.

'It stands to reason, my dearie, that a young lady going on for eight should walk with her governess; it is only fitting and proper, as Mrs. Bevan says'—Mrs. Bevan was Aunt Cosie—and then Mardie cautiously and with much tact explained to me the future programme. Miss Redford would spend every day at our house from ten until six—except on Saturdays, when she would be free after luncheon. This was arranged for my sake as well as my governess's, as Saturday afternoon was always spent with father, and he had no intention of changing our old habits.

'I shall hate walks without you, Mardie,' I observed, rather crossly, for Mardie was such a cheerful, self-effacing companion. What I liked, she liked; and she was so exceedingly sympathetic when I had a bone in my leg or growing pains, or any other childish ailment difficult to diagnose, and not very far removed from that distressing form of complaint which required what Mardie always termed 'temper powders,' when it was unusually acute. The rest cure in a carefully shaded room was the invariable remedy.

'Got the hump, Gipsy?' father asked once when he found me prostrate in my little frilled dressing-gown. I thought he looked at me rather quizzically, so I shut my eyes in a dignified way.

'A person's head must ache sometimes,' I returned stiffly, for in some moods I disliked to be laughed at. The fact was I had been excessively naughty, and even Mardie's stock of patience had been exhausted by my unreasonable fractiousness; but I had not yet arrived at the penitent stage, so father only shrugged his

shoulders and gave a little laugh ; and when he had shut the door I cried myself to sleep, and never woke until tea-time, when Mardie came to pull up the blinds and advised me to be quick, as Mrs. Kennedy had sent up hot scones. I soon made my peace with Mardie—for she never cherished any resentment—and when I went downstairs to spend half an hour in the twilight with father, I confessed to him that the headache had been caused by my own naughtiness. I never could go to sleep until I had told father everything. It was so comfortable to receive absolution, and to be assured that he was just as fond of me however badly I behaved ; and this fresh mark of his love always made me feel so humble and ashamed of myself.

‘Oh, I do wish I could be always good,’ I murmured remorsefully one evening, but father only smoothed my curls caressingly.

‘Oh, we all wish that, Gipsy,’ and he sighed a little heavily.

‘I think fathers are just lovely,’ I went on, ‘for they always forgive and never leave off being kind. I think you must be a very, very good man—I often tell Mardie so.’ But father made no reply to this, but the next minute he asked me if I would not like to take my revenge at Halma, for he had beaten me the previous evening. I noticed that father always changed the subject if I praised him too much ; but when one loves a parent with one’s whole heart, it is a little difficult not to think too much of him, and father was just perfection in my eyes.

I think both Mardie and I were a little low in our spirits that Monday morning when the new governess was to make her appearance.

I had a healthy appetite, and generally enjoyed my

food, but even the new-laid egg and crisp roll failed to tempt me that morning. But Mardie wisely took no notice; she only suggested that I should finish as quickly as possible, and feed my canaries as usual—my dear little Pecksey and Goldie. They always had a fly round the nursery while I cleaned their cage, and I had to bribe them with sugar or groundsel to come back.

I had only just hung up the cage again when I heard father's voice outside, and the next moment he entered the room with a tall young lady in brown, whom he introduced to us as Miss Redford.

'This lady is going to teach you, and help you to grow up a clever, accomplished woman, Gipsy; and you must be good, and learn all you can.' But I made no answer to this, only hung my head shyly as my new governess shook hands with me.

'Oh, we shall soon understand each other. Will you tell me your name, my dear?'

Miss Redford spoke in a crisp, decided voice. Strangers often thought her a little abrupt; she resembled Cousin Yvonne in that—and that reminds me that I have never mentioned Cousin Yvonne, but that will come later.

I must confess that I did not that first minute take to Miss Redford. I felt she would inspire me with more awe than affection. She was rather dark, and not exactly good-looking; but she had a fine figure, and carried herself well. She was dressed quietly, but in excellent taste—as father remarked afterwards to Aunt Cosie, 'he had never seen a better groomed young woman.' I remember Aunt Cosie told him that all the Redford girls were the same, and that people thought them very stylish. 'Claudia is the

least good-looking,' she went on, 'but her friends admire her because she is so clever,' Claudia being my Miss Redford.

It is not always easy for a reserved person to win the confidence of a child, and in spite of all her efforts to be agreeable and to talk down to my level, I am afraid it was a good many weeks before we really understood each other; and yet I tried honestly to like her, to please father.

My coolness and aloofness towards the new governess puzzled and disappointed him.

'Why don't you care for Miss Redford, Gipsy?' he said one day rather reproachfully. 'She is a rattling good governess, and I have to pay a pretty figure for her services. You are an ungrateful monkey, for I know she takes no end of pains with you.'

'Oh, I like her pretty well,' I returned carelessly; 'but I don't believe I shall ever love her; she isn't exactly the sort of person one can love. But I don't mind doing lessons with her; she explains things and makes them interesting; but the walks—oh, father,' and here a very real sigh burst from me. 'It is so dreadful, for she will teach me the French names for everything; she says it is impossible to carry on any real conversation for the next six months, but that this is the best way of teaching me; and she always asks me the next day all the horrid things over again, to be sure that I remember them.'

'Poor little Gip, you want lots of breaking in,' he observed in a pitying voice; 'but it is not a bad idea,' and partly to tease me, but perhaps to test my knowledge, he would persist in asking the French names of the principal objects we passed during our Saturday walk—trees, palings, ducks, even labourers carrying

ladders—until I rebelled and flatly refused answering another question, although he declared it was only a new teaching game ; but despite this assurance I would have no more of it.

I had some childish ailment about two months after the new governess's advent at St. Olave's Lodge. I think it was German measles ; but I had to keep in my room for some days, and it was then that I began to like Miss Redford better.

She was really a great resource during those trying days, for I did so hate my confinement. She spent most of the day with me, reading delightful tales to me. She was a most dramatic reader, and Mardie would often creep in with her work to listen to some thrilling scene ; and she would invent new games not too fatiguing to an invalid, and she was so amusing and good-natured that I must have been very ungrateful not to respond to her advances.

I believe, indeed I am sure, that she took a deep interest in me from the first. She has often told me since that I was the most bewitching original little creature she had ever met—'by no means faultless, Githa,' she would add. 'Dear me, what trouble you gave me those first few months !'

I think, with all her cleverness and kindness, Miss Redford was too reserved in manner to find the way easily to a child's heart. She had none of those little petting, caressing ways to which father and Mardie had accustomed me. Her kindness was bracing ; and though she was always ready to grant me any coveted indulgence, she would not tolerate listlessness for a moment.

'I must have your attention, your whole attention,' she would say sometimes when I was staring a little

absently out of the window. 'Work is work, and play play. If you find it so difficult to fix your eyes on your book, I must pull down the blind,' and more than once she had actually done so when the sunshiny ripples on the river and the passing boats distracted me too much.

There could be no doubt that Miss Redford knew her duties, and could stimulate a pupil's flagging interest in a marvellous way. It was she who suggested to Aunt Cosie that I should attend some dancing and drilling classes; and when I grew older she begged my father to allow her to take me to afternoon concerts, where I should hear good music; and it was also owing to her wise counsel that an excellent music-master gave me lessons. She herself was fully qualified to teach me French and German; indeed, she spoke both languages with the greatest facility.

I began to get quite fond of her after a time, and I used to question Aunt Cosie about her. Aunt Cosie was really my father's cousin, but she was so much older than he that the title of aunt came to her quite naturally. She was one of the prettiest old ladies I have ever seen in my life, she was so small and dainty, with such pink cheeks and silvery grey hair, as thick and fine as a child's; and she was so soft and gentle in manner that her name exactly suited her, and it was no wonder that father and I loved her, for every one must have done so.

She was very well off, and lived in a dear little house in Kensington ever since her husband's death; it was called Fairlawn, and was quite as comfortable and dainty as its mistress.

She was exceedingly proud of her husband's

memory, and she often talked of him to father. He was a General, and had done some very brave things, and he would have been knighted but for the sudden illness that carried him off.

I asked father one day why Aunt Cosie had no children—little people ask these awkward questions sometimes—and he said she had had a lovely little girl, Rose, who lived until she was my age, but scarlet fever had carried her off. Both she and the General had doated on her, and Aunt Cosie had been very ill for a long time.

I used to look very hard at Aunt Cosie after this. I wondered how she could have lived through such trouble, and yet look so smiling and placid, but I never ventured to ask her about Rose.

When I was puzzled about anything, and father was busy, I always found a safety-valve in talking to Mardie, so one day I asked her about Aunt Cosie—‘for I am so surprised that she can be so cheerful, living all by herself without that kind, brave old General and little Rose.’

Mardie was sorting some clean linen, but she was never too busy to attend to me.

‘Other folks have been surprised too, Miss Githa, my dear, but they don’t know the secret cause of her cheerfulness. Mrs. Bevan is a dear good lady, and she lives her religion. She had many a talk with me when I first came to St. Olave’s Lodge, for we had both known trouble, and she was always ready to speak a word of comfort’; and here Mardie heaved a deep sigh and paused for a moment.

‘I remember,’ she went on presently, ‘she found me crying one day, because it was the anniversary of my Fergus’s death, and I was very low, and she sat down

beside me and took my hand, and there were tears in her eyes too, and talked to me so sweetly of her own troubles, and where she had found comfort. Oh, it was just beautiful to hear her!

“ We don't see the silver lining to our cloud at first,” she said softly, “and some of us refuse to see it for a long, long time; but when we once recognise the Father's hand”—oh, it did my sore heart good to hear her.’ But just then Kenny interrupted us, and she could say no more.



CHAPTER III

I AM EIGHT YEARS OLD

O child ! O new-born denizen
Of life's great city ! on thy head
The glory of the morn is shed,
Like a celestial benison !
Here at the portal thou dost stand,
And with thy little hand
Thou openest the mysterious gate
Into the future's undiscovered land.
I see its valves expand,
As at the touch of Fate !

LONGFELLOW.

IT was one of my greatest treats to have tea with Aunt Cosie ; and I was always pleased when father would propose some fine Sunday afternoon that we should walk over to Fairlawn, and as I grew older these visits were made more frequently until it became part of our usual Sunday routine.

Now and then, when some old friend of his was in town whom he wished to see, father would leave me for an hour or two in Aunt Cosie's charge, and call for me later ; and I only hope the dear old lady enjoyed these hours half as much as I did.

I never thought tea tasted anywhere as it did when Aunt Cosie made it ! To watch her was a liberal education in the art of tea-making—to see her pretty

old hands rinsing out the cups and then filling them, and her dainty little manipulation of the sugar-tongs and cream-jug! Father used to tease her sometimes, and declare that in some previous existence she must have been the wife of some grand Japanese Daimyo, her veneration for 'the honourable Tea' was so marked; but this speech always shocked her excessively.

'How can you say such ridiculous things, Philip, in the child's hearing?' she observed once in a ruffled tone, 'and on Sunday, too!' for Aunt Cosie had all sorts of old-fashioned prim little ways, which were excessively amusing to smart up-to-date people.

Aunt Cosie was not much of a reader, and, with the exception of her Bible and the *Times*, she was seldom seen with a book in her hands on week-days; on Sundays she read a good deal, though she confessed that it often made her drowsy. On other days she gardened and worked. She was very fond of knitting and crochet, and made the loveliest fleecy shawls and wraps for her friends. I never remember seeing her idle for a moment. She had what she called her fancy work and her charity work, and it was her pride and delight to accumulate a stock of warm jerseys, crossovers, and baby's vests and shoes, to distribute amongst her poor people at Christmas. The drawing-room at Fairlawn was very pleasant, and the bay window opened on the little lawn with its beds of dwarf roses. At the end of the lawn was a small pergola covered with a crimson Rambler, and in one corner there was a rustic seat under an acacia-tree.

Aunt Cosie loved all flowers, but roses and lilies were her favourites, and except for the tall white Madonna lilies it was almost a rose garden; and on most fine mornings Aunt Cosie would put on her white

sun-bonnet and gardening apron and work for hours among her roses.

I remember my eighth birthday fell on a Sunday, and father suggested that we should pay Aunt Cosie a visit. 'I shall have to leave you after tea for an hour or so, Gipsy,' he observed, 'for I told Colonel Murray that I would have a look in at the Club to wish him good-bye.' But I assured him that I was always quite happy at Fairlawn. Aunt Cosie had a very pretty present ready for me, and a birthday cake with 'Githa' in pink sugar-plums on the white frosting; and, as we were expected, there were all kinds of good things for me, for Aunt Cosie had a treasure of a cook, and all her friends declared that they envied her. Her name was Hubbard, and I always would call her Mother Hubbard, to her great amusement. We were very friendly together, and when I ate her crisp short-cake and delicious waffles and buns I always felt a deep respect and esteem for her, and more than once I drew invidious comparisons between her and Kenny.

When father had left us I drew a low ottoman closer to Aunt Cosie's chair. It was the middle of April, and though there was a bright fire in the grate the sunshine was so pleasant that the tea-table had been placed near the window, for Aunt Cosie loved to look out on her borders of spring flowers.

I don't know how it was that we began talking about the Redfords, but I remember that Aunt Cosie told me a good deal about the family which interested me greatly, and she spoke of them with keen appreciation. She told me that they had been very well off at one time, and that the four girls had all finished their education at Paris and Dresden. 'They had all the advantages that wealth could give,' I remember her

saying. 'Mrs. Redford was a very cultivated woman. It was not until Claudia and Helen had returned from Dresden that their father failed. You are too young to understand business, Githa ; it is sufficient for you to know that through no fault of his Mr. Redford found himself a comparatively poor man.'

'Oh dear, how dreadful, auntie.'

'It was very disastrous certainly, and not being a strong man the shock caused his death—at least the doctors said so ; but I think myself that his heart had always been weak, and that any agitation might have carried him off.' And then Aunt Cosie went on to tell me that the beautiful house at Prince's Gate had to be given up, and that during the short year or two their mother lived they had a small house in Chelsea.

Mrs. Redford's health had become seriously impaired, and the doctors had long suspected there was latent incurable disease. After her husband's death this had rapidly developed, and even her daughters were thankful when she was mercifully released from her suffering.

I was so interested that I begged Aunt Cosie to tell me more, and though she smiled at my eagerness, she told me that she could not refuse anything to her little girl on her birthday.

'I saw a great deal of Claudia and her sisters at that time,' she went on. 'Claudia—your Miss Redford, Githa—was younger than Helen, but she was very managing, and always took the lead.

'They were in sad perplexity, poor girls. Their mother's long illness had been a heavy drain on their slender purse, and when everything was settled they found that they had only a balance of two hundred pounds left of their capital, and some small investments which brought them in about ninety pounds a year.

'I remember Helen telling me with tears in her eyes that they would be obliged to give up their nice little house, and move at once into some cheap flat. "We have all made up our minds not to separate, but to get daily work," she told me; and though more than one friend remonstrated with them about this, they were bent on carrying out their plan. They were a very united sisterhood, and perfectly content with each other's society. The Redfords are always clannish and rather reserved to the outer world, but their friends appreciate them for all that.'

'And did they go to a flat, Aunt Cosie?'

'Yes, my dear, and very uncomfortable they found it. I remember Cicely saying in her laughing way that there was not even room to swing a kitten; but they were plucky girls, and made fun of all their difficulties, and they were so splendidly equipped for the battle of life that they soon found occupation. Helen and Claudia became daily governesses, Cicely gave lessons in a school, and Agneta, the youngest, became reader and companion to a blind lady, and only came home now and then for a week-end. Her sisters much regretted this, but the distance was too great, as Mrs. Luxmore lived at Chislehurst, and the terms were too good to refuse.'

'But she comes home sometimes?'

'Well, hardly,' returned Aunt Cosie, smiling. 'Agneta is in India at present with her husband and baby—she married Captain Luxmore, the blind lady's son; and Cicely is married too, to a physician in good practice, Dr. Burford.'

I was very much surprised to hear this, and so dreadfully interested that Aunt Cosie was quite surprised and called me 'Miss Curiosity'; but it was not

really curiosity. In my childish precocious way I was studying my governess under a new light, and I felt more warmly towards her now I knew something of her life-story.

'I suppose it will interest you to know that Helen is engaged too, to a young barrister I know very well, Hamlyn Seymour ; but he is so poor that there is no chance of their being married for the next ten years, as I sometimes tell them. Now, Githa, my dear,' as the church bells rang out, 'we have gossiped enough. Surely you have some pretty new hymn to sing to me. Open the piano, my pet—you will find the big hymn-book all ready.' I rose reluctantly and tried to do my best, but it was a very feeble attempt, and I was quite relieved when a firm hand pushed me off the music-stool and father quietly took my place.

Father sang beautifully, and he played well too, and I knew how Aunt Cosie loved to hear him. She closed her eyes, and there was such a satisfied look on her dear face as she listened.

Father insisted on my joining, and we sang one hymn after another, all Aunt Cosie's favourites ; but by and by, when she asked for 'Sun of my soul,' he shook his head and said he was tired, and then he got up abruptly.

'Father never likes singing that hymn, Aunt Cosie,' I said with childish want of tact ; 'he never will sing it even at church.'

'Why not?' exclaimed Aunt Cosie. 'It is so beautiful, and quite my favourite hymn, and I remember it was——' here Aunt Cosie started and flushed a little, and when father said good-bye to her she looked at him so tenderly. 'God bless you, Philip,' she said very softly ; but I heard her.

Father was very quiet all the way home ; and though I chattered to him continuously about the Redfords, I am not sure that he listened very attentively. When father was in one of his moods a person could never be sure how much he heard !

He woke up at supper-time, and we were very cosy together ; and he drank my health, and made Hallett drink it too, and Hallett made me quite a little speech.

Mardie had promised that I should sit up until a quarter past nine, so I followed father to the library, and climbed up on his knee as usual, though he pretended that I was far too old and heavy, and that he had my favourite complaint—a bone in his leg—but I knew better than to believe such nonsense. I knew too well how he loved to have me there, and to feel my curls against his cheek as I leant against him.

All kinds of odd thoughts were buzzing through my head that night, and I felt that I must give them vent.

‘Aunt Cosie has been just lovely to-day,’ I began, ‘and her present’—a charmingly fitted up writing-case—‘is the beautifulest thing I ever saw.’

‘The most beautiful I think you mean, Gip.’

‘Yes, of course,’ rather impatiently, for how was a person of eight on her birthday to bother herself with adverbs and adjectives. ‘Yours and Cousin Yvonne’s presents were lovely too,’ for father’s gift of a little gold Geneva watch was a source of intense pride to me, though Aunt Cosie had scolded him for his extravagance, and told him I was far too young for a watch—as though one could ever be too young to enjoy beautiful things. Even grown-up people make mistakes, I thought, when I heard Aunt Cosie say this.

'Aunt Cosie is such a dear,' I went on. 'She is so nice and smiling always, but I can't make out how she can be so happy living all alone. This house is so big, father. I wonder you never asked her to live with us.'

'It seems to me that you live in a chronic state of wonder, Gipsy,' he returned teasingly.

'No, but truly and seriously, father,' for I was not to be put off in that fashion.

'Well, then, truly and seriously, I did suggest something of the kind to Aunt Cosie a long time ago, but she did not seem to see it—perhaps she thought we should not get on at such close quarters.' Father spoke a little drily. It was not for many years that I found out the reason why Aunt Cosie refused to share our home, and yet she loved us both so dearly!

Father had just told me that I was always wondering. I do not think I was more curious or inquisitive than other children, but I was certainly rather precocious and thoughtful for my age.

Why did neither father nor Mardie ever talk to me about my mother—for, of course, I must have had a mother like other children. I had asked Mardie about her once, but she had said rather shortly that when I was older no doubt my father would tell me.

'Your father has his own ideas about bringing up children,' she continued hurriedly. 'He thinks they should be as happy and free from care as the young lambs in the meadows, so he never talks about sad things to them, but keeps his troubles to himself like a kind, brave gentleman.'

I thought Mardie's remarks a little disconnected and unconvincing, but her unusual stiffness of manner

prevented my saying so. Of course it is sad when one's mother dies, even if one does not remember her clearly, but I felt in a dim, childish way that it would be much nicer if father talked about her sometimes, and gave me the opportunity of asking questions, but he never did, and I puzzled my childish brains over it far oftener than Mardie guessed.

I think I must have been a little excited that evening, but it suddenly jumped into my head that I must ask father one question that had been rankling in my mind all the week, ever since my last dancing class.

I had taken a fancy to a little pale girl in black, and now and then we found opportunity of a talk together. She was a delicate little creature, and the aunt who brought her to the class took a great deal of care of her. Though she was so small she was two years older than I. I remember she told me her name and her age when we were partners together in the lancers.

'Father,' I said suddenly, 'do you know, Minnie Linkwater—the little girl I told you about at the dancing class—said something so queer the other day. She asked me if mother's grave was in Brompton Cemetery, for she and her sister go there every week with flowers, and she did seem so surprised when I said that I did not know.'

I felt father give a quick shudder as though he were cold, but the fire had died down and I could not see his face clearly, for there was a screen between us and the lamp; then he sat bolt upright, but made no answer.

'Minnie's father goes with them sometimes,' I continued plaintively, for I was bent on airing my secret

grievance, 'and he talks so beautifully to them about their mother, and you never, never talk to me of my mother.' Then father gave a quick, impatient groan, as though he were in pain.

'Githa!' he said so reproachfully, 'you are hurting me very much. I thought my little girl loved me too well to grieve me.'

I was so shocked by this speech that my eyes filled with tears—and yet what had I said?

'Oh, I do love you, I love you more than the whole world,' I exclaimed, throwing my arms round his neck; but he would not let me kiss him, and his face looked so pale and stern.

'If you loved me you would trust me, Githa,' he went on. 'A child of your age, a mere baby, should not question her father's actions or doubt his wisdom. I have my own ideas on these subjects. If I do not talk to you about your mother, it is because I prefer silence. You are not yet old enough to share my confidence. Be satisfied, my little Githa, with knowing that your mother was a good woman, and loved you dearly, and that in this house her memory will always be revered, that in spite of all——' but here he stopped and looked so strange that I was quite frightened. I think he saw that, for he took me in his arms again. 'Will you do something to please me, darling?'

'Anything, anything,' I murmured with tears.

'No, do not cry about it, but listen to me. If you can help it, do not let people talk to you about your mother. I do not care for outsiders to be inquisitive over our affairs. If your little friend asks you questions, tell her that you would rather not talk about it. Will you do this, Githa?'

'Yes, father, I will do anything rather than make

you unhappy,' and then he kissed me in his old way.

'Thank you, dear. Then I will promise, on my part, that when you are older, and the right time has come, that I will tell you all you want to know—but not yet, my girlie,' and then he sighed and kissed me again, and told me to run off to Mardie or she would think I was lost.

I am sure Mardie knew I had been crying, but she asked no questions, only gave me a great hug when she tucked me up, and bade me go to sleep and dream of my presents.

I could not at once follow her advice, for I was so wide-awake, and it made me so dreadfully unhappy to remember father's pained expression. I could not bear to think I had hurt him ; and as for loving and trusting him, he need never doubt me again. I would rather be silent all my life than displease or grieve him.

I suppose I was tired out, for I cried myself to sleep at last, and only half-awake when some one kissed my forehead and murmured, 'God keep my treasure,' but I roused up when the door had closed.

Of course it was father. He often stole in to wish me good-night, and I was so happy to think that he had done it to-night, and on my birthday, that I turned over on my pillow again and was soon in dreamland.

CHAPTER IV

I FALL IN LOVE WITH HELEN

Children have the effect on your spirit that morning air has on your body. There is no exhaustion in them ; they are charged with life, and health, and sunshine.—R. W. BARHAM.

I shall be then a garden charmed from changing,
In which your June has never passed away.
Walk there awhile among my memories.

ALICE MEYNELL.

IT was not until Miss Redford had been at St. Olave's for nearly a year that I made my acquaintance with her sister Helen, and then it was only owing to accident.

We were just returning from our morning walk one day, and I was chattering away as fast as my extremely limited stock of French phrases would permit, when a big raindrop fell on my face, and Miss Redford exclaimed in rather a troubled voice :

' We must hurry as much as possible, Githa, for we have no umbrella, and we are still some distance from home. I am afraid there will be a regular downpour directly, and you have a little cold, Mrs. Marland tells me,' but though I quickened my steps into a run to keep up with her my efforts were of no avail, for it began to rain in earnest.

'Our flat is only round the corner,' she continued, 'and we can take shelter there while the shower lasts. Take my hand and let us make a run for it'; and, laughing and breathless, we found ourselves a minute later in our refuge.

I was quite delighted with this unexpected interlude, and when we had shaken ourselves and regained our breath Miss Redford rapidly ascended three flights of stairs and let herself into the flat with her latch-key, and I followed into the narrow entry, which at first seemed rather dark. As we entered another tall young lady in brown, a fair edition of my Miss Redford, but, as I discovered afterwards, far better-looking than she, came out from the sitting-room; she seemed very surprised to see her sister at this hour.

'Why, Claudia,' she exclaimed, 'what good wind has blown you in this direction so early in the day?' Then she caught sight of me. 'This must be your pupil, little Miss Darnell'; and she took my hand and kissed me so kindly. I remember I was rather surprised, for it was some weeks before Miss Redford left off shaking hands with me; but then she was not a demonstrative person, as Mardie observed, and with her kisses were, like angels' visits, few and far between.

I was pleased to find Miss Helen Redford so friendly, and I liked her at once. She had such a nice restful face, though it was rather pale and tired-looking; and though she had the Redford voice, it was gentle and rather sweet, though, as I found out afterwards, all the other sisters spoke in the same quick, crisp fashion.

'We were caught in the rain, Nell,' explained my governess, 'and the child has a little cold; it was care-

less of me to leave our umbrellas at home, but it looked so fine when we started.' And then they both divested me of my hat and jacket, and Miss Redford took me into a very small bedroom and dried my hair. The room was very pretty, I thought, and there were a good many beautiful silver things on the toilet-table; but it seemed to me that there was hardly room to pass between the bed and chest of drawers.

I asked Miss Redford, as she put me tidy, if this was her room, and she said 'Yes,' and that her sister's was exactly like it; and then we went into the sitting-room, where we found Miss Helen Redford doing some lovely embroidery in a frame. She told me it was church work, and that she and three other young ladies were trying to finish an altar frontal by Christmas for a mission church in Battersea, which was extremely poor, and had only shabby things for use.

'I wish I could give more time to it,' she continued wistfully; but her sister chimed in in her quick, decided way:

'You ought never to have undertaken it, Helen; you have already far too much to do. It is all very well for the Pritchards and Cissie Brown, for they have no teaching or any other occupation to tire them.'

'Oh, well, I daresay you are right,' returned Helen good-humouredly; 'but it does so rest me to get to it for an hour. I have been making the most of my holiday, Claud. Why, it is nearly one o'clock; I must have been more than three hours at it.'

'Nearly one,' observed Miss Redford in a disturbed tone; and then she and Helen exchanged glances.

'I am afraid the rain has set in for an hour or two,' continued Helen. 'Poor Claudia! but accidents will happen sometimes. Mrs. Brant will be going home

soon, and we could easily get her to take a message to St. Olave's Lodge.' Then Miss Redford brightened up at this.

'That is a good idea, Nell. I will send a line to Mrs. Marland and tell her we are weather-bound ; the good soul always gets so flustered and anxious if Githa is half an hour late. But that reminds me, how will you manage?' but here Helen put her finger on her lip with a significant look.

'Write your note, Claudia, and I will come and speak to you directly' ; but Miss Redford had scarcely left the room before Helen had followed her, and I was left alone.

I made good use of my time by inspecting all the pictures and photographs. The room was not large, and it was crowded with furniture, but it was very pretty and cosy ; there was a piano and a harp—Helen played the harp, I learned—and an Indian cabinet full of china, which I heard afterwards was extremely valuable. There was a writing - table, too, and some delicious easy-chairs, and some of the pictures were beautiful ; perhaps it was a little too much like a curiosity shop, and there seemed hardly room for Helen's frame.

I was getting very hungry by this time. I wondered if Miss Helen would ask us to have any luncheon, and then an appetising whiff reached me ; and the next moment she came in smiling and took me into the next room.

It was the smallest, funniest little dining-room I ever saw. There was only just room for a round table and four chairs beside the fire-place, and an oak corner cupboard ; you could not move without coming into contact with the walls. I remember how I enjoyed

the fried eggs and bacon ; and though there was no pudding, there was an abundance of sweet biscuits and some delicious preserve—I think it was guava jelly.

‘You see, Githa,’ observed Miss Redford in her calm matter-of-fact tone, ‘my sister and I are generally out until six, so there was no luncheon provided, but I don’t think we have done so badly after all,’ and I hastened to assure her that fried eggs and bacon was my favourite dish, and that I had enjoyed my luncheon more than usual.

‘Little folk are easily pleased,’ observed Helen pleasantly, and then she found me an interesting book which she said her own pupils loved. It was *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, and I found it so fascinating that I was soon absorbed in its contents.

The sisters left me alone for some time, but as the flat was small I could hear their brisk movements and voices quite plainly ; presently they came back looking very neat and trim, and Miss Redford, who was embroidering a frock for a baby niece, sat down to her work while Helen returned to her frame.

They spoke to me now and then, but I was almost too engrossed with my book to answer ; it was not until the light was fading, and I was getting tired of reading, that I took any notice of their talk. When I did so, Helen was speaking.

‘We were both so taken up yesterday with Cicely’s party that I never told you that Hamlyn looked in on his way to town ; he told me he had just come across Elmer Pelham.’

Miss Redford looked up quickly.

‘Well, did he give any account of himself?’ in an interested tone.

‘Yes, he has been away. His brother was ill, and

he had to go to Liverpool. Hamlyn says he asked after us very particularly. Cicely told me she intends sending him a card for the 19th.'

'That is nice of Cicely, as I know she is rather afraid of him; she will have it that he is so satirical.'

'I think she is right there; Mr. Pelham quizzes people unmercifully.'

'Only people who pose and make themselves ridiculous,' continued her sister hastily; 'he is far too kind-hearted to hurt any one's feelings.'

'Oh, I might have known you would defend him, Claud,' returned Helen in an amused voice; 'for all your sparring and word-play you two always stick up for each other.'

'I always stick up for my friends,' observed Miss Redford, 'and then I am so sorry for him; he seems so heavily handicapped, no one to give him a helping hand.'

'He is not worse off in that respect than my poor Hamlyn.'

'Oh, but Hamlyn has you, my dear Nell; that makes all the difference.'

It seemed to me that Helen was about to say something when she saw me looking at her, and changed her mind.

'How dark it is, Claud; I dare not try my eyes any longer. I shall go and get tea. I think the rain is stopping now, and that it will soon clear up'; and she was right, so when we had finished tea we made haste to get ready for our walk home. Father often returned early, and he would not like to miss my greeting. I remember how kind Miss Helen was to me, and the way she smoothed my unruly locks. 'What a gipsy the child is,' she observed, shaking my thick

mane in an admiring way. 'Will you come and see me again, Githa.' I told her with the utmost sincerity and earnestness that I should love to come, and then she kissed me as though she were pleased, and told her sister that she must sometimes bring me to tea on Wednesday ; for Miss Helen had two half-holidays in the week, while my governess had only one, but then, as I found out later, her summer vacation was far shorter.

I think Miss Redford was pleased at my eagerness to revisit the flat, but she told me that I must get my father's leave, for she was extremely punctilious and careful to ascertain his opinion on every point. They met seldom, for she never had luncheon with us on Saturdays when father was at home, and unless he appointed a specified time he rarely had an opportunity of speaking to her. On this evening, however, he had returned home earlier than usual, and as Hallett admitted us I saw him coming out of the library.

'Better late than never, Gip,' he called out. 'Come and give an account of yourself, you monkey,' and then he shook hands with Miss Redford, and thanked her for taking such good care of me. 'Nurse Marland has just brought me your note ; in another minute I should have sent Hallett in a cab to fetch Githa, but as it is quite fine now I do not suppose her late walk has hurt her.'

I think father expected Miss Redford to come in, but she told him that she must hurry back, as she and her sister were going out to dinner. He wanted to send for a hansom, but she would not hear of it for a moment, though it seemed to me that she took his civility as a matter of course.

The Redfords could never forget the old days at

Prince's Gate, and though they were now working women they still held their heads high, and considered themselves equal to any one.

'Oh, father,' I exclaimed, blinking a little in the bright light, 'I have had such a lovely time; it was such fun running through the rain and having luncheon in the flat. It is just like a doll-house, and crammed so full of nice things that one could hardly move, and Miss Helen Redford is such a dear. She is prettier than my Miss Redford, and so kind, and she wants me to have tea with her sometimes on Wednesdays. May I go, father dear?'

'We will see what Aunt Cosie says,' he replied kindly, for he always consults Aunt Cosie about me—not that he always took her advice, though he gave himself a good deal of trouble sometimes to ascertain her opinion.

I found Aunt Cosie quite approved of the invitation. The Redford girls, as she called them, were her pet protégés, and Helen was decidedly her favourite. 'By all means let Githa go as often as she likes,' had been her answer. 'She will gain nothing but good from her intercourse with them. Helen Redford is a dear sweet girl, though this unlucky engagement to Hamlyn Seymour will make an old woman of her before her time.'

A few days later I told my governess that father and Aunt Cosie would be very pleased for me to have tea with her sister whenever she liked to take me; and she smiled and said that she must consult Helen, and that if I learned my lessons well for the next fortnight she would try and get me an invitation. And after this it became an understood thing that all future visits should be rewards for diligence.

I always enjoyed these Wednesday afternoons, and I liked Miss Helen more and more. I was becoming much attached to Miss Redford also. I found one could always depend on her. She was a person without moods; she was invariably kind, not by fits and starts like some people, and she never said a word that she did not mean; and in my childish way I guessed how good she would be to me if I were in any trouble. I am glad that I did her justice, for in her quiet, undemonstrative way I know she loved me dearly, and that there was nothing she would not have done for me.

'I was always your friend, Githa,' she said years afterwards. 'Of course I know that for a time you liked Helen best, but that was only natural. She was not your governess, and she never fretted you with tiresome rules and regulations. And then Helen has a way of her own with children; she knows how to draw them out and interest them. I tell her it is quite a gift. I am afraid I never had it myself,' and she gave a quick little sigh that touched me.

I know now that Miss Redford was right. I always found it easier to tell Miss Helen things. She never seemed shocked, but only quietly amused when I blurted out my childish opinions.

I remember one afternoon Miss Redford had an engagement, and left me for an hour with her sister, promising to be back by tea-time. Miss Helen had given me some wool to wind, and I was very happy talking to her.

'Miss Helen,' I said suddenly, 'I wish you would tell me the name of the gentleman who spoke to us on Monday. Miss Redford seemed to know him very well, for we stopped quite a long time before she said good-bye.'

I thought Miss Helen looked amused, and I was sure from her manner that she knew of whom I was speaking, but she would not give herself away.

'A gentleman is rather vague, Githa; you must describe him better than that before I can answer you.'

'Oh, he was a dreadfully ugly man.'

This seemed to puzzle her.

'Ugly?' she repeated doubtfully.

'Yes; he had a long pointed chin, and no hair on his face, and when he laughed he was all crinkly round his eyes.'

'Why, bless the child, it could be no one else but Elmer Pelham! but what put it into your absurd little head to think him ugly? He has quite a nice, clever face, though he is not handsome.' But I was in the mood to be contradictory.

'Mr. Seymour is not a bit handsome either,' I observed in my precocious manner, 'but I like the look of him'; and Miss Helen blushed a little, but I could see she was pleased.

'Thank you, dear,' she said gently; 'but I am sure if you knew him better you would not think Mr. Pelham ugly. Somehow when one likes a person one never considers if he be good-looking or plain.' But I was too young to understand this.

As time went on I saw a good deal of Mr. Pelham, for Aunt Cosie coaxed father to show him some attention, and now and then he came to dinner. I heard Aunt Cosie tell father that Elmer Pelham was very poor and proud, and had few friends. 'He cannot afford to go much into society, and, with the exception of an elder brother, he has only distant relations. He is a clever, good-hearted man, and a little kindness would not be thrown away on him, Philip'; and as

father often acted on Aunt Cosie's advice, Mr. Pelham was always a welcome guest.

I soon became friends with him, and he often told me amusing stories, and I ceased to think him ugly. Indeed, I once confided to Helen that but for his crinkly eyes he would not be so bad-looking after all. I fancy she repeated this speech to Claudia, for I heard them laughing together in the next room, but of course she took no apparent notice. Miss Redford was always very careful to uphold the dignity of her office.



CHAPTER V

COUSIN YVONNE

The foundation of every noble character is sincerity.—ANON.

Character is far more an inspiration than a manufacture. Toil of discipline and patience of culture may accomplish wonders in shaping a soul, but the uplook of a reverent love to a nobler nature will draw down into the inner springs of the being the forces of that better life.—HELEN NEWTON.

I AM afraid I am writing my childish reminiscences in rather a disjointed and cursory manner, just putting down things that come into my head—people, faces, scenes, and scraps of conversation—little shadowy glimpses of the child Githa and those who loved her; a jumble or patchwork of odds and ends, without method or arrangement. All this time I have only made a casual mention of Cousin Yvonne, and yet, next to father and Aunt Cosie and Mardie, she had the greatest influence on my young life.

Mrs. Darnell was a cousin of my father's, a second cousin, I believe, but she was some years younger than he. I never heard anything of her husband. I once asked father if he had liked him, and he said 'not particularly' rather drily, 'but that most of his friends had thought him a good fellow.' He advised me very seriously not to mention him to Cousin Yvonne, and being a loyal little creature I always did my best to

obey him ; but I privately thought that grown-up people were too fond of mysteries, for being a chatter-box by nature I never liked to hold my tongue about anything. It is so much more interesting to wonder about things aloud, and to talk over them comfortably. Mardie used to shake her head when I said this. 'You are a rare talker, my dearie,' she would say ; 'your tongue runs from morning to night like a little purling brook. When you are older, Miss Githa, you will find out for yourself that it is often wiser to be silent—but there, you have not cut your wisdom teeth yet,' for Mardie never could bring herself to find fault with me.

I was very fond of Cousin Yvonne. I think I really loved her better than Aunt Cosie, but I never quite understood her.

Until Sydney came she lived alone in a pretty cottage called Prior's Cot at Bayfield. Even in those days I used to think Bayfield a sort of earthly paradise, and I do not think I have changed my opinion yet. If I loved it in my childish days, it is still dearer to me now !

I fancy a good many people thought Bayfield a nice place. It was only a mile from the river, but it was a countrified, quiet spot, with lanes and a goose green, and such a charming church and vicarage ; and there were pleasant houses dotted here and there, some of them standing high in extensive grounds, with a delightful view of the white shining river and the boat-houses. I remember how surprised I was when father first told me that it was the same river that we saw from Cheyne Walk. It seemed to me so much broader and more beautiful, and there were no water-lilies or rushes in our part ; and then father smiled in

a funny way, and said that water-lilies did not flourish at Battersea.

Prior's Cot was not far from the Vicarage, but it was a very secluded little place. It was half-way down a green lane, and there was no other house near it. Cousin Yvonne said that this was a recommendation in her eyes, for she would hate to be overlooked by neighbours. 'When I want my friends I can go to them, or they can come to me, but I am fond of my own society, and I am never dull alone'—how often I have heard Cousin Yvonne say this.

Prior's Cot was certainly an ideal cottage. It had a deep porch always filled with flowers, and the red-brick walls were almost smothered with creepers, roses, jessamine, and wistaria, not to mention honeysuckle and clematis—a perfect medley of lovely things, trying which could climb highest. And then the garden which surrounded the cottage—how Cousin Yvonne loved her garden! I think I never saw flowers in greater profusion. In summer time the bees and butterflies came in troops to the royal feast of floral dainties spread so richly before them. But I liked the wild garden best. It was a perfect joy in spring to see the primroses like a sheet of pale gold, and little blue pools of wild hyacinths. And then there were nooks where one could find violets and forget-me-nots.

There was an old wall in one part with crumbling masonry and half-rotting stones; here in their season bloomed masses of wall-flowers, blood-red and purple, buff-yellow and orange, a perfect glory of tints. Close by this was a big rock-garden, where hardy ferns grew in profusion, and here one could gather the double cuckoo-flower—Cousin Yvonne told me once that

Lady's Smock was its old English name. 'It is rather an appropriate name,' she observed, 'for I remember reading a description of it where the writer remarked quaintly, "that its close masses of whitish bloom might well remind one of linen wear laid out to bleach."' In the rock-garden one could often find the common speedwell and thrift, and all kinds of lovely wild-growing weeds. I used to think that the wild garden never needed any care or attention, but as I grew older I soon found out my mistake, and that Cousin Yvonne had expended a vast amount of thought and energy before she brought it to its present perfection. She once explained matters to me.

'You have no idea, Githa, what an overgrown wilderness it was when I first came to the cottage—every path blocked up with brambles and nettles, and so damp too. I took Moyle into my confidence'—Moyle was Cousin Yvonne's gardener and factotum—'and I read up all the books I could find about wild gardens and rockeries, and then we set to work—at least Moyle did—clearing paths and lopping branches, and getting rid of the nettles and noxious weeds. And then when we had made things a little tidy, and it was possible to walk there with dry feet, I set about beautifying it. We turned the old wall to account for all lime-loving plants, and used a heap of stones for the construction of a rock-garden. Then we planted in every available place violets and primroses, and daffodils and wild hyacinths, and all the hardy ferns we could collect. I am rather proud of my success,' she continued, 'and in spring it is a joy to me to see the violets peeping out from their nest of leaves.' And I remember, as we paced down the little path bordered with bracken, that

she quoted softly some favourite verses that we both loved :

God does not give us new flowers every year ;
When the spring winds blow o'er the pleasant places,
The same dear things lift up the same dear faces :
The violet is here !

It all comes back—the colour, grace, and hue ;
Each sweet relation of its life repeated,
No blank is left, no longing for is cheated :
It is the thing we knew.

It was always a pleasure to hear Cousin Yvonne repeat poetry. She had a deep musical voice, which seemed to rise and fall rhythmically with the metre.

Prior's Cot had been originally built by a lady in good circumstances, and was intended as a country retreat for herself and an invalid daughter ; but the latter's sudden death gave her mother a distaste for the place, and it had not been inhabited when Cousin Yvonne bought it. I believe she paid a good deal for it.

It was extremely well built, and by no means small. The porch opened into a large square hall, which Cousin Yvonne fitted up as a sitting-room, and used in the hot weather. Here there was a small organ. The drawing-room was long and somewhat low, with charming nooks and corners, and front and back it opened on the verandah which surrounded the cottage. In winter this made the rooms a little dull, but Cousin Yvonne always kept glorious fires, for she loved cosiness. All the bedrooms had pleasant views. Cousin Yvonne's, who slept in the front, had a side window looking up the lane, and through a break in the trees there was a pretty glimpse of the church and vicarage. My room was at the back, and overlooked the garden and

wilderness, as we sometimes called it. Just beyond was a little wood, and set against a dark background one could just see the white turret of St. Helen's Tower, where Lady Wilde lived.

There was an old medlar-tree in the wild garden, which was very easy and safe for a girl to climb; and as Cousin Yvonne never objected to my doing so, I used to love to sit in the low branches and gaze down into the heart of the little wood, which always looked so green and pleasant to my childish eyes. When Sydney came we used to spend hours in the old medlar-tree, and I often made up stories about the wood and about a poor little princess who roamed there. I did so like telling Sydney stories, she was such an interested listener, and then she always said I was so clever and told them so well.

Lady Wilde was a widow, and her only son was dead; but her orphaned grandson lived with her. Thurston was three or four years older than I, and he was far too big a boy to play with a little girl of my age. He was a dark-complexioned, handsome lad. He had, I fancy, a foreign strain in his blood. Some one told me his mother had been Andalusian by birth, and had been either a singer or dancer, I forget which; but I know that Lady Wilde had objected to the marriage, and that during her daughter-in-law's life she held herself severely aloof from the young couple.

In his careless boyish way Thurston took a good deal of notice of me. He was rather a lonely boy, for his grandmother was exceedingly strict with him. He used to bring me flowers and speckled eggs and peacock feathers, and petted me a good deal; he always wanted to call me Gipsy, but I never would

allow it, for no one but father ever used that name. I remember he argued about it for a long time one afternoon. 'Of course Mr. Darnell calls you Gipsy,' he said, quite impatiently; 'and every one ought to call you that too. You are just a little Romany girl, Githa, with your brown face and dark eyes; and when you tied that crimson thing over your curls, you should just have seen yourself.' But I would not be convinced; it was father's pet name and sacred to his dear lips—not even Cousin Yvonne or Aunt Cosie ever used it. Thurston was so tiresome and so persistent that I cried about it at last, and he told me that I was a baby and marched off in dudgeon; but after that he never attempted to use it again.

I was very fond of Thurston, and so was Cousin Yvonne, but when Sydney Herbert came to live at Prior's Cot he seemed to prefer her society to mine. She was a year and a half older—a nice-looking girl, with a clear skin and Irish grey eyes, and with plenty of Irish fun.

I became perfectly devoted to Sydney, but my childish breast was secretly wounded by Thurston's fickleness, but I was far too proud to say so. I made believe not to mind when Thurston began giving her things; and when occasionally he seemed to forget my existence I bit my lips to keep the tears back and ran off to Cousin Yvonne, and she always seemed to understand and welcomed me so kindly.

'Two are company, and three are none,' she would say sometimes; but I have reason to know that she spoke rather seriously to Thurston.

'You ought not to keep poor Githa out of things,' I overheard her say once. 'You are an ungrateful boy, Thurston, for the child is so fond of you.'

'But I am very fond of her too, Madame,' returned Thurston in a surprised voice. I never could understand why he always called Cousin Yvonne Madame. I believe now that it was a pet name he had invented for her, for she was a great favourite of his. 'I think Githa is a dear little thing, but Sydney is older, and after all I only took her to see my pigeons. Githa has seen them a hundred times'; and then I suddenly awoke to the fact that I was eavesdropping, and ran off with my fingers in my ears; but that one sentence, 'I think Githa is a dear little thing,' made me quite happy.

But all this time I have not described Cousin Yvonne. Somehow I find it difficult to do so, for it seems to me that my childish memories are so mixed up with later impressions and the more perfect knowledge of growing womanhood that I cannot distinguish them.

At that time she appeared to me to be a grey-haired girl, with the nicest face possible, and rather sad dark eyes, that looked at one very kindly—but this is a very vague description. I know now that she was a beautiful woman, and that her dark eyes and silvery grey hair gave her a striking appearance. She wore her hair turned back over a small pad in the style of Marie Antoinette, and coiled very simply at the back. She was generally rather pale, but any sudden agitation or surprise brought a beautiful colour to her face, and at such times she looked extremely handsome. All her features were good, but her mouth closed a little too firmly, and this gave a somewhat hard look to the face, but her smile, which was very pleasant, at once destroyed this impression.

One thing I did notice even in those days.

'Cousin Yvonne,' I once said to her, 'what nice hands you have,' and I remember that she looked quite surprised at my speech. But they were beautiful hands for all that; rather large, but so perfectly shaped, and the cool, soft touch was unlike any other hand I ever felt. But Cousin Yvonne was not the sort of woman to pride herself on any physical gifts. I believe she was perfectly conscious of her good looks, but she seemed to take little or no pleasure in the knowledge that people admired her.

Dearly as I loved Cousin Yvonne I must confess I was always a little in awe of her. Reckless and daring as I was, I never ventured to take a liberty with her, or to argue or demur if she gave me an order. I had an innate consciousness that any act of disobedience would have had unpleasant consequences; and yet I had no reason for this fear, for I never received anything but kindness from her. I was somewhat wayward at times, probably from the effects of home petting, but she was always patient and tolerant of my childish moods.

I have mentioned before that in manner she somewhat resembled Miss Redford, and it is true that they both spoke in the same quick, decided way, as though they knew their own minds on most subjects, and never wasted time on argument.

I have heard Aunt Cosie say that Claudia Redford was a little too abrupt in manner for so young a woman, and probably she was right; but no one could accuse Cousin Yvonne of abruptness, she had far too much dignity for that; she was proud, reserved, and when not interested in people somewhat cold in manner, but no one who knew her well could doubt her kind and generous nature; she was a royal giver,

but I think it was always easier for her to give than to receive.

I always spent August and September with Cousin Yvonne, while father went abroad or to a shooting lodge in Scotland. This rule never varied. On the 31st of July, unless that date fell on a Sunday, and then a day earlier was fixed, Mardie took me to Bayfield, where Rebecca, Cousin Yvonne's confidential maid, met me at the station, and on the 1st of October I travelled back under Becky's guardianship to Paddington, where Mardie, trembling with joy and eagerness, received her darling as though restored from the dead. Besides this annual visit I always went to Prior's Cot for a fortnight at Easter, as father usually went to Paris for ten days or so to visit some friends.

Those visits were always delightful to me, and the only cloud on my brightness was the parting with father. I never could say good-bye to him without tears, and though he pretended to laugh at me I know he dreaded the long separation as much as I did. My greatest pleasure was to write to him and receive his dear letters.

Not long ago father showed me a drawer full of these childish letters, all neatly tied up and docketed, with dates affixed, many of them with foreign post-marks. I opened one or two of them as he watched me; we both smiled at the blotted scrawl. 'Your own loving little Githa,' or 'With Gipsy's dear love to darling father—with a hundred kisses.'

When I was at St. Olave's Lodge I always wrote to Cousin Yvonne once a week. She asked me to do so, and I always took great pains with these letters, and if I made an unsightly blot or smudge Miss Redford made me re-write them. I think this wholesome

discipline rather destroyed spontaneity and pleasure of composition. My anxiety about spelling, too, made me regard these weekly epistles in the light of a task ; but it was always a delight when Tuesday brought me Cousin Yvonne's answer. She always wrote so kindly, and told me what I most wanted to know—about little lame Johnnie at the Lodge, and the pigeons, and how many chicks the speckled hen had, and how Moyle was making a new rock-garden in the wilderness, and all sorts of little home details to interest me.

I used to make father read these letters, and he seemed to enjoy them as much as I did, and sometimes he would say nice things about them to please me. But then that was always father's way ; my childish pleasures and griefs were so much to him, and nothing was too trivial to rouse his interest or sympathy. Dear father, no wonder your child thought you perfect !

CHAPTER VI

SYDNEY COMES TO PRIOR'S COT

It is impossible for any one to see her without being deeply interested by the ingenuity, liveliness, and sweetness of her disposition.—SIR WALTER SCOTT.

I am going to take the world into my confidence, and say, if I can, what I think and feel about the little bit of experience which I call my life, which seems to me such a strange and often so bewildering a thing.—A. C. BENSON.

I AM tempted to linger unduly over these early reminiscences from sheer love of my task. As I recall these memories a subtle fragrance seems to steal to my senses—faint odours of roses and violets, and other sweet things; rosemary there is in plenty, but little rue: the bitter flavours of life had not then reached me. I am sure that no one had a happier or more protected childhood. I write it with a grateful heart, and with tears in my eyes.

I have always believed that no amount of happiness in after life can compensate entirely for an unhappy childhood. There is something incongruous and pitiful in the very idea. Young shoulders shrinking under the weight of burdens too heavy for them, timid natures misunderstood and terrorised, spending joy-

less days in the repressive atmosphere of parental tyranny—oh, the waste, the pity of it!

I think, on the great anniversaries of our lives, when we are recalling the past with all its blessings and sorrows, that we might add one clause to our thanksgivings for the priceless gift of a happy childhood, for the sweet memories stored up in our treasure-house of life. It would do us no harm, and would hallow the present hour. On my birthday, and on the anniversary of the Incarnation, when we ponder on the mysteries of the Holy Childhood, I have always made this special thanksgiving, and I trust, as I get old, I shall never omit this custom.

My visits to Bayfield are certainly among my pleasantest memories, time always passed so quickly at Prior's Cot. There were so many delightful things to do: to help Cousin Yvonne feed the pigeons and chickens, and to collect eggs. Cousin Yvonne had given me a beautiful pair of fantail pigeons for my very own—Pomp and Fan we named them. Pomp was a very conceited, pompous bird, exceedingly vain of his snow-white plumage, and Fan followed his example. They thought themselves much better than the other pigeons; but they soon became wonderfully tame with me, and when I called them, they would flutter down and eat out of my hand or perch on my shoulder.

Cousin Yvonne gave me a yellow chick too; it was such a dear thing, and I called it Downy. But on my next visit it had grown into an ungainly, long-legged fowl, and I lost interest in it, for ugly creatures never appealed to me.

Somehow the days always seemed too short at Prior's Cot. In the morning Cousin Yvonne gave

me a few easy lessons, and insisted on a quarter of an hour's practice on the piano. I did not dare protest, but I felt inwardly mutinous. 'I thought every one had holidays,' I mumbled once, for Fiddle, the little Skye terrier, was dancing round a tortoise on the lawn, with barks of puzzled delight, and he wanted me to explain matters to him ; and even the adventures of Gaston the Savoyard did not interest me.

'Two months' holiday is far too long for a little girl of your age,' returned Cousin Yvonne in her quiet, decided way. 'Come, Githa, you have only an hour's lessons, and there is all the rest of the day to play in. Be a good child, and make the best of it.' And this view of the case was so reasonable that I left off frowning.

Of course Cousin Yvonne was right. The hour's regular discipline gave an added zest to my play-time. I was never listless or dull for a moment. That tiresome question of spoiled childhood, 'What am I to do now?' was never on my lips ; indeed, the choice of employments was almost bewildering. I could climb the old medlar-tree and sit there with a story-book, or there was the swing and the hammock. Cousin Yvonne was always too busy to play croquet with me in the mornings ; but Fiddle was ever ready for a race or a game of ball. He would play hide-and-seek with me in the wild garden, or trot obediently behind me when I went to the Lodge with a message. But this was not all I had to do, for I had a little garden of my own, and Cousin Yvonne gave me a delightful set of gardening tools. There was the dearest little wheel-barrow and watering-pot. She taught me how to sow seeds and plant bulbs, and she liked me to know the names of the flowers. I took a great deal of interest in my garden. My roses and

lilies and carnations were quite beautiful ; and when I was away Cousin Yvonne looked after it for me.

There was another occupation I loved, and that was going with Cousin Yvonne to the cottages. Such nice people lived at Bayfield. Very few were really poor, but they loved a neighbourly chat, and the sick and aged fully appreciated the good things she took them. The old vicar, Mr. Dennison, always declared that Mrs. Darnell pauperised his parishioners ; but he would say it with a twinkle in his eye, as though he did not mean it, for he thought there was no woman like Cousin Yvonne.

I liked Mr. Dennison, but I did not find him specially interesting. He was an old bachelor, and very precise and courtly in his manners, and he was rather a book-worm. He was a good, well-meaning man, but not cut out for a parish priest, and though he was charitable, and showed much kindness to his people, I think they scarcely appreciated him. His sermons were certainly a little tedious. I never could find out what Cousin Yvonne thought of them, for she always refused to discuss sermons ; but she and the vicar seemed on excellent terms. His health was not good ; and when he became a confirmed invalid, and had to keep a curate, Cousin Yvonne always went to the Vicarage every day to read the paper to him and cheer him up. She took him flowers and little dainties, because she said that his housekeeper did not understand how to tempt an invalid's palate.

I am quite sure that Mr. Dennison was deeply attached to Cousin Yvonne ; he left her some very valuable books and curios when he died. I was between fifteen and sixteen then, and Sydney wrote to me a full description of the funeral.

I was about ten years old when Sydney Herbert came to Prior's Cot to live with Cousin Yvonne. Sydney was not related to her; she was the only child of an old school friend who had made an unhappy marriage. Her husband's death had left her and her child wholly unprovided for; indeed, Cousin Yvonne found them, I believe, in a state of poverty bordering on utter destitution, for Mrs. Herbert was too ill to work. From what Sydney told me, I gathered that Cousin Yvonne had been a veritable angel to them. She took the poor widow and her child under her own roof, and provided a nurse for the invalid, and when she died Cousin Yvonne promised to care for Sydney. 'I will treat her as though she were my own child, Margaret,' the girl heard her say. 'Poor mother was so happy when Aunt Yvonne said that,' finished Sydney with a sigh; for from the first that was what she called Cousin Yvonne.

I well remember the day when I first saw Sydney. I had just arrived at Prior's Cot for my summer visit, and Cousin Yvonne came out as usual in the porch to welcome me. There was a little flush on her face, and her eyes were unusually bright as she kissed me.

'Githa,' she said, 'I have such a surprise for you, but I think you will be pleased'; and then she kept my hand and we went into the drawing-room together. I remember so well the mingled fragrance of tea and roses that greeted us as we crossed the threshold, and Sydney came smilingly to meet us—a tall slip of a girl in a black frock, with a plait of brown hair tied up with black ribbon, and large Irish grey eyes which were regarding me rather seriously.

'Githa, my dear,' observed Cousin Yvonne, 'this is Sydney Herbert; her mother was a very dear friend

of mine. I call her my adopted daughter because she has no one else to mother her, and she has come to live with me. I want you two to be very good friends.'

Cousin Yvonne had almost taken my breath away. I was literally too surprised to speak; but I shall never forget the frank, sweet way in which Sydney kissed me, and the earnest sincerity of her voice as she exclaimed, 'Oh yes, I hope so, Aunt Yvonne.'

And now, as I wish to be truthful in these pages, I have a little confession to make. In spite of my pleasure at having a companion so near my own age who could share my pursuits, I am afraid my feelings were a little mixed, and not wholly devoid of jealousy, and that for the first few days I was not quite sure that I was glad that Sydney was to live at Prior's Cot.

I am ashamed to own this, but I must plead in extenuation that all my short life I had been accustomed to regard myself as the centre of interest to the dear people who surrounded me. I knew that, however much they tried to hide it, all my wants and wishes were of importance to them—in short, I was a spoiled and petted child.

I was therefore disposed to regard Sydney in the light of an interloper, and I was afraid that, during my long absences from Prior's Cot, Sydney would so endear herself to Cousin Yvonne that I might by and by be deposed from my present position as favourite.

I remember one evening when I was not well, and therefore inclined to be captious and fretful and full of fancies, that I put my arms round Cousin Yvonne, when she came to tuck me up and see that I was comfortable—her usual custom—and said plaintively:

'Cousin Yvonne, I do hope you will always be fond

of me—I mean,' as she seemed surprised at this, 'that you will always love me better than Sydney.'

'Why, Githa,' she returned, smiling, as she sat down beside me, 'I hope you are not going to be jealous of poor Sydney! That is not like you, my dear. Surely there is room in my heart for both of you.'

'Yes, but I want you to love me best,' I persisted, and I wished it so much that the tears were in my eyes, but she only stroked my hair with a firm, caressing gesture and seemed thoughtful.

'You are not vexed with me?' I whispered presently, for her silence alarmed me. Then she looked at me very tenderly.

'Not vexed, darling, only sorry that my little Githa should not be more generous. Surely you do not forget that poor Sydney has no mother to love her now, and that we must all try to make her happy?'

I felt rather ashamed when Cousin Yvonne said this, and the tears began to flow freely.

'I am fond of Sydney,' I sobbed. 'She is very, very nice, and I want her dreadfully to be happy; but,' choking a little, 'I can't help it, Cousin Yvonne, I do want you to love me best.'

I do not know what made Cousin Yvonne so forbearing and gentle with me that night, but, as I said this, she took me in her arms so kindly and kissed me more than once.

'Darling, put this nonsense out of your head. I love you very dearly, and it is not likely that I shall change. No one can take my little Githa's place as long as she is good and lovable, but I must love poor Sydney too, for the sake of her dear dead

mother.' And then she bade me good-night and went away ; but I felt strangely comforted, for, though she had not actually said so in words, her voice and manner assured me that she cared for me most.

Cousin Yvonne never referred to this conversation, and after a time my jealousy died a natural death.

There was no resisting Sydney. She was simply the most delightful companion and friend that a girl could have. She had a charming temperament, for she was sweet-tempered and unselfish, and so perfectly frank that no one could help loving her ; and though she could be thoughtful and even serious at times, she had plenty of Irish fun and drollery about her ; and to crown her other merits, she was very fond of Princess Githa, though why both she and Thurston took to calling me 'the little Princess' is more than I can say. I asked Sydney the reason one day, but she declared that she did not know.

'It just came into my head,' she observed, 'and somehow the name suited you. You have such a funny little grand manner sometimes, and then you toss your head just as though you were a real princess. Now don't frown, Githa, for I know you are not really stuck up and proud one bit. You are just a jewel, and the darlint of me heart,' for Sydney knew how to talk blarney, and it was pretty to hear her brogue.

Of course Thurston liked her best, and small blame to him, but I soon forgave his fickleness, and we were all three good friends.

Sydney was absolutely devoted to Cousin Yvonne. She used to talk about her sometimes when we went up to our room. I remember one Sunday evening when she came and sat on my bed a long time ; it was impossible for either of us to go to sleep, for

Cousin Yvonne was playing on the organ in the hall below, and my room was flooded with moonlight and sound.

Cousin Yvonne always played on the organ on Sunday evening. She called it her Sabbath rest. She was passionately fond of music, and she played Chopin and Beethoven with much feeling and expression. That evening she had been playing selections from Handel's oratorios. Sydney and I had been listening enraptured to that lovely melody, 'He shall feed His flock like a Shepherd'; and when she had finished this she had taken her hands off the keys for a moment and bade us very softly leave her and go to bed.

'It is getting late; run away, children,' and then Sydney kissed her, and I followed her example.

I remember I looked back for a moment before I ascended the stairs. The moonlight poured in at the windows and open door, and the organ candles lit up Cousin Yvonne's figure as she sat there in her white dress. She often wore white, and, strange to say, it suited her in spite of her grey hair. I could see her beautiful face so plainly as she sat there, her head drooping a little over the keys. Then she took out the stops again, and that glorious refrain, 'Let the bright Seraphim,' pealed through the house.

'Did not Aunt Yvonne look sweet this evening?' observed Sydney admiringly, as she curled herself up cosily by my pillow. 'I thought she looked like an angel in her white dress. Did you notice how silvery her hair looked in the moonlight? Oh, I do think she is just the loveliest thing in the world.'

'I think so too,' I returned with conviction, 'next to father, of course.'

'Yes, but he is a man,' returned Sydney quickly. 'Men are never lovely, are they? They are only handsome and nice. Don't begin about your father to-night, Githa, or you will never stop. I was wanting to say something. Is it not sad that, with all her goodness and kindness, dear Aunt Yvonne should not be happy?'

I was very much startled at this extraordinary statement on Sydney's part. I felt as though a douche of cold water were suddenly turned on me.

'What do you mean, Sydney? Cousin Yvonne is perfectly happy,' but Sydney shook her head.

'If she were happy, why should she look so sad? Sometimes when she is playing, or at church—oh, surely you have noticed her at church—but no, you sit next her. More than once when we were alone, and it was getting dark, I have heard her sigh so heavily; and once when Wright was bringing in the lamp she started up quite suddenly and left the room, and, Githa, I feel sure she had been crying.'

'Crying—oh, impossible!' I exclaimed, for the idea of Cousin Yvonne being unhappy and shedding tears like any ordinary mortal seemed quite a preposterous idea.

'I don't see the impossibility,' returned Sydney mildly. 'Aunt Yvonne may have troubles that she would not tell us. I really am afraid it is true, Githa, for dear mother once said that she was never so sorry for any one in her life as she was for Aunt Yvonne. Mother would never have said that if Aunt Yvonne had no trouble.'

I was not convinced, and I remember I argued the matter very obstinately with Sydney, for I was unwilling to believe her, but she said very quietly that I should soon find out that she was right—'Not that it is any

business of ours,' she continued seriously ; 'only when people are not quite happy I think we ought to love them better, and do all in our power to comfort them.' And then, as the music ceased, she said she must go to her own room, as Aunt Yvonne would not like our talking so late.



CHAPTER VII

IT IS ALWAYS DARNELL AND CO.

The child leans on its parent's breast,
Leaves there its cares, and is at rest ;
The bird sits singing by its nest,
And tells aloud
His trust in God, and so is blest
'Neath every cloud.

ISAAC WILLIAMS.

THERE was one thing which often puzzled me, for children even of eight and nine think more deeply than grown-up people imagine, although they are often too shy to give expression to their thoughts. It was far easier to talk things over with a companion of one's own age. I had often wondered why Cousin Yvonne had never come to St. Olave's Lodge, and when I remarked this to Sydney she seemed rather surprised too.

'Why don't you ask Aunt Yvonne the reason,' she returned, for Sydney was always very practical and straightforward ; she never beat about the bush on any pretence whatever.

'I have asked her,' I said, in a perplexed voice ; 'but she only said she so seldom came to town, and then only on business. But I do think, Sydney, that she might come and stay with us sometimes.'

'Why don't you ask your father to invite her?' was Sydney's reply, and I thought this piece of advice so sensible that I was determined to act on it on the first opportunity. I was going home the next day, but just then father was very much taken up with some important business, and I scarcely saw him from morning to night; but one afternoon, when I was spending a few hours at Fairlawn, it came into my head to talk to Aunt Cosie.

She did not seem at all surprised at my question; only when I suggested that Cousin Yvonne should be invited to spend a few days at St. Olave's Lodge, she said very quietly:

'I should not ask your father to do that, Githa; he never likes to refuse you anything, and it would place him in an awkward position.'

'But why—I don't understand, Aunt Cosie.'

'No, my dear, I daresay not,' and then Aunt Cosie hesitated for a moment. 'The fact is,' she continued slowly, as though she found it difficult to explain things to my childish comprehension, 'many years ago there was some misunderstanding and difficulty connected with your Cousin Yvonne's husband, and which makes things a little awkward for both of them.'

'But father likes Cousin Yvonne,' I returned eagerly; 'he is quite pleased for me to go and stay with her. He said once that he had an immense respect for her.'

'Then I am quite sure he meant what he said,' replied Aunt Cosie. 'Now you are a sensible child, Githa—although that father of yours and Mrs. Marland do their best to spoil you—and I want you to listen to me a moment. What I have told you is in confidence, because you have a wise little head as well as a loving

heart, and I think you are to be trusted. Now, I am not sure that father will be pleased at my saying what I have, so I don't mean to tell him,' and here Aunt Cosie gave a pleasant little laugh.

'Oh, then, I had better say nothing either,' I returned rather regretfully, and Aunt Cosie gave a little nod, and presently we began talking of other things.

I was rather proud that Aunt Cosie had reposed confidence in me; there was something flattering in the idea that she had treated me like a grown-up person. I was glad that she thought me so sensible for my age, and I determined to try my hardest to live up to this good opinion.

'Of course,' I said to myself as I walked home with Mardie, 'if father had had a misunderstanding or quarrel with Cousin Yvonne's husband, it would certainly make things a little awkward for both of them,' and then I wisely determined to put the whole thing out of my head until I was older.

But I must hurry on, for I cannot expect my kind and tolerant readers to be as interested as I am in these childish recollections. I intend to skim over the next few years in an airy and birdlike manner, taking long flights, then swooping down for a moment to pick up a crumb, a worm, or a shred of wool, as birds do for the lining of their nests.

When I was between twelve and thirteen I had a feverish attack which weakened me a good deal; the doctor said I had been growing too fast and was very much run down. I certainly felt very ill, and for three or four weeks I could not leave my bed; but Mardie and Miss Redford nursed me devotedly.

It was then that I found out Miss Redford's value; she volunteered of her own accord to remain in the

house, and as Mardie insisted on sleeping in my room, she took a considerable share of the day nursing, and she was always so patient and cheery, so unmindful of fatigue and confinement, so forgetful of her own comfort and convenience, that I grew to depend on her more and more. She was such a wholesome bracing person that it made me ashamed of being fretful and impatient, and when my dear Miss Redford was in the room I always tried hard to bear my pain or weariness as well as I could. It used to help me so to hear her say, 'You have been a dear good child to-day, Githa'; or 'That's a brave little woman,' as I submitted to some disagreeable but necessary injunction. I think I valued praise from her more than from any one, because she commended so rarely.

Mardie's treatment was hardly so judicious. She was so sorry for her darling, she sympathised so excessively with me, that I am sure my aches and pains were as real to her as her own. She petted and pitied me from morning to night, and until I began to get better she scarcely closed her eyes until morning, so great was her watchfulness and anxiety. My dear old self-sacrificing Mardie!

Father came up to me as often as he could, and would sit by my bed silently holding my hand if he were not allowed to talk to me. I saw Miss Redford look at him once or twice so intently, as though he interested her. It worried father so much to see me ill that I used to pretend that I was ever so much better; but I could never deceive him; he would shake his head, and his eyes would grow quite sad. 'I wish I could bear it for you, Gipsy,' he would say, 'but we must both be patient, my girlie'; and somehow I understood then how he hated to see me lying there;

but I always assured him when I bade him good-night that I should soon be well again.

I was protesting to this effect a little too eagerly one evening, when I saw a look of great fear come into his eyes, and then I clutched him and knew no more. I heard afterwards that I had fainted, and that father had been very much frightened, but Miss Redford had quietly begged him to lay me down on the pillow and had at once used the proper remedies, and I soon regained consciousness. But she would not allow me to say a word. 'You must lie still and drink this, Githa,' she said in her quick, kind way, 'and you must try to go to sleep.' And then father gave her a sign which she seemed to understand, for she went out of the room and did not return for a few minutes, and father sat down again beside me and put his arm round me, and I nestled comfortably against his shoulder and soon fell into a doze. I know when I woke up I was surprised to see Dr. Mordaunt standing at the foot of my bed with Mardie behind him. 'I did not know it was morning,' I said feebly, for I was a little dazed still.

'Bless your dear heart, my lamb, it is not ten yet,' observed Mardie; but father checked her, and then Dr. Mordaunt put his fingers on my wrist and asked in his kind way if I felt more comfortable.

'Oh, I am always comfortable when I have father's shoulder for a pillow,' I returned sleepily; and then Dr. Mordaunt laughed. But I do not remember any more, except that I had an impression that Mardie never went to bed at all that night, and that whenever I woke father was still beside me.

I had a sort of relapse after this, and Dr. Mordaunt told father that I must be kept very quiet. Aunt

Cosie, who came to see me every day, only stayed a few minutes in my room. I used to beg her in a weak voice to remain, because I loved to see her dear old face near me, but she only patted me and said we must obey the doctor's orders, and I was not strong enough to argue the point.

I used to think a good deal of Cousin Yvonne as I lay there; it often came into my head how I should love to hear her play on her organ again, 'Let the bright Seraphim,' or 'Angels ever bright and fair.' One evening when I thought I was alone I muttered half aloud, 'I think Cousin Yvonne would make a lovely angel.'

'What is that you say, Gipsy,' asked father quickly, and I repeated my speech; 'but I did not mean any one to hear me,' I finished shyly, but I do not remember what he said in reply.

It was quite certain that Cousin Yvonne did not forget me, for nearly every day I had the loveliest messages from her. Flowers came constantly; not only cactus, dahlias, and chrysanthemums from my special garden, and late-growing roses from the verandah, but the choicest and most delicate blooms from the greenhouse, which must have been ruthlessly despoiled for my benefit.

Then every few days there was the daintiest fruit-basket with bunches of purple and white grapes, and great luscious pears and yellow bananas. They were so prettily arranged that I used to lie and feast my eyes on them; and there were such dear little notes tucked in between the red leaves. Oh no, certainly Cousin Yvonne did not forget me.

As soon as Dr. Mordaunt gave permission I was lifted from my bed to the couch in the schoolroom, and

then came a very eventful day when father carried me downstairs into the library, and he and Miss Redford pillowed me up on the great Chesterfield couch. After this I spent some hours there daily, and father used to come home early to have tea with me. If he were delayed Hallett carried me down, and then father found me there when he opened the door. What happy afternoons those were in spite of my weakness! Miss Redford would make tea for us, and then she would go home to her flat, for, as Mardie always helped me to bed and slept in my room, there was nothing for her to do until morning.

I loved being alone with father, and he was so dear and good; he read and talked to me, and when I grew stronger he would play games with me, and the time always passed so quickly that it was quite a shock when Mardie came in to tell us that it was seven o'clock, and that I must be carried upstairs again. Father used to pretend that I was getting so heavy that he could hardly bear my weight. He would pause on the landing, and puff and groan, and he was quite delighted when Mardie, who was following us with the pillows, begged him to summon Hallett. I saw the twinkle in his eyes, for he did so love a joke. 'No, thank you, Mrs. Marland,' he returned in a resigned and exhausted voice. 'St. Paul tells us that every man must bear his own burden, and there is only one more flight of stairs. Come along, Gipsy—Excelsior,' and then he toiled on heavily, while I buried my face in his coat to prevent myself laughing outright. I knew I was only a featherweight to him, and that he could have carried me a mile or two without fatigue, but I don't think Mardie discovered the joke.

When Miss Redford went back to the flat father

made her such a nice little speech. 'I shall always be grateful to you for your kind care of Githa,' he said, and he gave her such a beautiful present—a lovely little watch and chain.

Father was always generous, and when people pleased him he was never comfortable in his mind until he had made some return. I had mentioned to him casually that Miss Redford's watch was so old, that it was quite worn out and useless; it had belonged to her mother. 'She means to get quite a cheap one for daily use,' I continued volubly; but it had never occurred to me that father would take any special notice of my remark.

I could see Miss Redford was intensely surprised, but she was pleased too. She coloured up, and seemed so embarrassed that father had to put her at her ease in his kind way.

'You will not refuse our little gift, I hope, Miss Redford. It is from Githa as well as from me. Remember we have to thank you not only for these weeks of nursing, but for years of thoughtful training and patient labour,' and when he said this she took the little case with a shy word of thanks. It was always difficult for her to express her feelings, but as she kissed me I am sure there were tears in her eyes.

'Your father says I am to thank you too, Githa, for this magnificent present.'

I think I should have told her the next moment that I was quite as much surprised as she was, only father interposed.

'It is always Darnell and Co.,' he said hastily, 'isn't it, Gip?' and after that he often called me 'Co.' in his playful way.

It was Darnell and Co. who presented that beautiful

black silk to Mardie, which was laid by in tissue paper and lavender for so many years that I threatened Mardie with divers pains and penalties unless she had it made up at once.

'But I was keeping it for your wedding, my pretty,' returned Mardie regretfully. 'Why, it is far too grand for Sunday wear—it quite stands alone with richness and stiffness.'

'If I am ever married,' was my reply, 'which is not at all likely, father shall give you a black satin,' for I knew how Mardie had coveted such a possession; but even with this inducement I had some difficulty in getting my way with the dear old thing.

Dr. Mordaunt had told father that I had outgrown my strength, and that I had better go to the seaside for a few weeks; lesson-books were to be discarded for at least two months. I was just to eat and drink and sleep and get strong, and as Dr. Mordaunt's injunctions had the authority of the Medes and Persians, no one ventured to set them aside. Certainly I had no wish to do so, for when one is tired to death from morning to night, and feels inclined to cry at the least exertion, lessons seem the most tiresome things in the world. Scarcely a day had elapsed since Dr. Mordaunt had delivered his verdict, when I received a long letter from Cousin Yvonne proposing the most delightful scheme. She told me that she and Sydney were going to spend a couple of months at St. Leonards. A friend of hers had lent her her house and servants while she went abroad. 'She wanted me to stay for three months,' wrote Cousin Yvonne, 'but I told her I must be back for Christmas. Mrs. Chambers's house is delightfully comfortable. It is not facing the sea, though there is a side view from some of the windows.

It has a sunny aspect, and is just the house for an invalid, as it is thoroughly well warmed. You shall have a room quite close to mine, and Sydney will sleep in a small one leading out of it; and as Rebecca will of course accompany us, you will have all the attention you require.' It was a very kind letter—every one said so—and of course there could be only one answer. The family council, consisting of father, Aunt Cosie, and Mardie, decided unanimously that it was far too advantageous an offer to refuse. Mrs. Chambers was a rich woman, and her house was sure to be replete with comfort. There would be no cold, draughty passages; the rooms would be warm and snug; and then there was the use of the carriage, and Rebecca, too, was an excellent nurse.

Father told me to write a grateful letter of acceptance, and was surprised when I hesitated.

'It is only the thought of leaving you,' I whispered; 'but for that I should love to go to the seaside with Cousin Yvonne and Sydney; but I do hate to leave you, darling.' But he would not listen to this for a moment.

'I shall be very much engaged for the next fortnight, my dear,' he said seriously. 'There will be no more library teas for some time. When I have got through the press of business I rather think of running down to Boscombe for a week or so. I promised Colonel Dacre that I would look him up, and I could not take you with me, Gip'; and as father had evidently made his plans, and the prospect of a few weeks at St. Leonards was decidedly attractive, and I was longing to see Cousin Yvonne and Sydney, I consented to the separation with a tolerable grace, though some inexplicable feeling made me say suddenly:



‘If I were to be ill again, you would come to me, would you not, father, and Mardie too?’

‘I don’t think it is likely that we should either of us stay away under those circumstances, Githa, my dear’; but father spoke a little drily, as though he thought I need not have asked such a question.

CHAPTER VIII

'BEGGARS ALL'

Once well matched and mated, conditions of life are neither here nor there, if you are born into them and they are short of absolute penury. A little house and little in it; a great house full of fine things; in each a man and woman, 'born for each other,' mates, comrades, lovers; and two pair of human beings equally happy.—F. GREENWOOD.

THE weeks at St. Leonards passed quickly and happily away, but I do not intend to dwell on them now. One thing made a deep impression on me and remained long in my memory, and that was the pained look in Cousin Yvonne's eyes when she first caught sight of me at the station. I knew by the way she took hold of me, and the quiet intensity of her kiss, that the change in my appearance had given her a shock—indeed, she owned this to me afterwards.

'If I had known how ill you had been I should certainly have come to see you, Githa; but I never realised it for a moment.'

'But Aunt Cosie and Miss Redford wrote to you,' I returned quickly, 'for they both told me so.'

'Yes, but they said as little as possible. Mrs. Bevan's letters were very kind, but——' Here Cousin Yvonne checked herself, and her lips closed as though they were suddenly locked and sealed.

I was always sorry when Cousin Yvonne's beautiful mouth had this expression ; it made her look hard and old, and gave one the impression that nothing would induce her to speak if she wished to remain silent. At such moments I would not have ventured to say a word.

'My poor little white-faced child,' she murmured tenderly as she tucked me up in bed that first night, 'but we will bring the roses back before long.' But I heard her sigh as she left the room.

I was always happy with Cousin Yvonne, and Sydney was such a dear companion, and the weeks passed almost too rapidly. I was young and my constitution was good, and I had plenty of recuperative force, so I soon regained strength and spirits. When I returned six weeks later to St. Olave's Lodge, father held me out at arm's length and looked at me with a pleased and satisfied expression. 'Good child,' he said briefly, 'you are a credit to your nurses—and you have grown too'; and all the rest of the evening he could hardly bear me out of his sight, he was so glad to get his Gipsy back again !

I saw very little of Miss Redford just then, as lessons were not to be resumed until after Christmas, but she came in sometimes to see me, and I thought then that she seemed a little preoccupied and hardly as cheerful as usual ; but when I hinted at this, she told me rather hastily that she and Helen were exceedingly busy and much taken up with some important affairs.

'I have no time to wait now, Githa,' she observed, 'for I have to go to Sloane Street for Helen. By the bye, I have not given you her message. She wants you to have luncheon with us on Thursday if your father has no objection. I will come and fetch you,

and if he would be kind enough to send the carriage for you, you could stay for tea.'

I was very much pleased with this invitation, and when I told father he said at once that he would call for me on his way home.

'I fancy there's something up with your dear Miss Helen,' he said mischievously; 'but I am not going to spoil sport, and wild horses would not drag another word out of me.' But I thought he was only teasing me, and I pretended to take no notice.

Miss Redford came for me quite early on Thursday. She was still a little graver in manner, though she made an effort to be cheerful. On our way to the flat she said rather abruptly that she had some news to tell me; her sister Helen was to be married soon after Christmas.

I was so surprised at this unexpected intelligence that I stood still in the street and stared at her until a child and a hoop and a dog came blundering up against me, and then Miss Redford laughed and took my arm, and we went on again.

'She is going to be married at last, after all these years,' I gasped; for I was nearly thirteen, and at that age a girl often manifests a lively interest and curiosity in grown-up love affairs. 'The thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts,' and already Sydney and I had discussed these subjects with girlish zest, and Sydney, who was a year and a half older, had quite a repertoire of pretty, romantic stories, all based on fact, which her mother had told her. There was one about a girl named Sheila, who had lived in their village, which always affected me when I heard it, for she had been quite a heroine in her humble way, and had refused to marry the lad she loved because her parents were

poor and needed her to work for them—and I forget the rest, except that Patrick was faithful to her and that it all ended happily.'

Miss Redford gave a deep sigh when I had made this remark.

'You may well say after all these years, Githa, for it is nearly eight years since she and Hamlyn Seymour were first engaged, and even now Mrs. Bevan and other kind friends think it would have been wiser to wait a little longer.'

'I hope they will not be very, very poor,' I observed anxiously.

'They will certainly not be rich,' returned Miss Redford; 'but Hamlyn has got a little work, and hopes to get more in time, and Helen will go on with her teaching.'

'But it will be horrid for her to work when she is married!' I exclaimed. 'And she is always so tired.'

'I don't think she will be so tired then,' observed Miss Redford in rather a peculiar tone. 'Worry is more trying than any amount of hard work. I hope you will never have reason to find this out for yourself, Githa.' And then she told me that Helen and her husband would live at the flat. Mrs. Brant would come daily for a few hours, and Helen would do the rest. 'They think it will work excellently,' she continued; but I interrupted her.

'Will you live with them, Miss Redford?' I asked in a perplexed voice, for the flat was so small that I wondered how three people could be accommodated comfortably, and Mr. Seymour was such a big man.

'No, my dear,' with an amused smile; 'such an arrangement would hardly answer. Cicely and Dr. Burford have been very kind, and have begged me to

live with them. They are dear, good creatures, and the children are darlings; but I prefer to be independent, so I have taken rooms not far from St. Olave's Lodge.'

'You will live all by yourself? Oh, how dull you will be!' But she shook her head.

'Busy people have no time to be dull, and I shall be surrounded by kind friends. Of course,' her voice changing a little, 'I shall miss Helen—we have never been apart in our lives; but the flat is very near Galvaston Terrace—within five or six minutes' walk—so I dare say I shall see her nearly every day.'

'Galvaston Terrace? Do you mean that row of houses facing rather an ugly bit of the river,' I inquired, 'with tall chimneys and wharves and a bridge?'

'Yes; it is rather an old-world place. Do you remember a quaint little house with a small bow window and balcony, almost smothered in Virginia creeper? You used to call it the Nutshell. Well, that is where I am going to live. The bow-windowed room is to be my sitting-room, and a very snug little room it is; and there is a comfortable bedroom at the back. Mrs. Church, my landlady, is such a nice woman. So I think I have done the right thing.'

I was very much interested in all Miss Redford had told me: it was delightful to feel that she would be so close to us; but I could not refrain from expressing my surprise that she had not accepted the Burfords' offer. They lived in the Regent's Park, and once when Miss Redford had taken me to the Zoological Gardens we had had tea at Twyford Lodge. I had been very much impressed by the handsome house and our lively, good-natured hostess. I thought Cicely charming, and Dr. Burford exceedingly kind

and pleasant ; and the babies were such little dears. I could not help thinking that Miss Redford would have been happier with them ; but when I hinted this, her answer was very decided.

'I love all my sisters dearly, and Cicely has the sweetest temper in the world ; but I should not care to form part of another person's household. I shall be far happier and freer in the Nutshell. I really think I must keep that name. Don't trouble your dear little head about me, Githa. I am not likely to have much of my own company. Helen and Cicely insist that I must spend one evening every week with them ; and I have other kind friends who are equally importunate—— But here we are at the flat, and I am quite out of breath with talking.'

Helen opened the door to us. She received me affectionately. I had not seen her since my illness, and she took me to the light to have a good look at me.

'You have grown a good deal, and still look thin and weedy,' she remarked. 'She seems older, Claud.'

I took this as a great compliment, for I was secretly anxious to grow up as fast as possible, that I might be a companion for father, and take the head of his dinner-table ; and I used to look at myself in the glass nearly every day to see if I looked older.

I thought Miss Helen looked years younger, and so bright and pretty. She had lost her fagged, tired expression, and her forehead was quite smooth. She seemed very pleased when I told her this, and blushed in quite a girlish way ; but she only said quite simply that she felt better and happier, now difficulties had been overcome and she could see her way more

clearly ; and after luncheon she took me into her room, and showed me her modest trousseau, and several very pretty and useful presents.

Aunt Cosie told me afterwards that Helen had gone through a great deal of worry and anxiety ; things had seemed so hopeless that her brother-in-law Dr. Burford, and even Cicely, had begged her to break off her engagement to Mr. Seymour before she was quite worn out, and other friends had given the same advice.

'They pestered her so,' went on Aunt Cosie, 'that I believe she did offer to give Hamlyn Seymour his freedom ; but he refused to give her up. "We will stick to each other," he said to her, "and one day our luck will turn." And, poor dear, she was so fond of him that she would have waited for him twenty years rather than give him up.'

They were married very quietly from Twyford Lodge, and, to my delight, I was allowed to go to the wedding. Helen wished to have me with her, so father gave me permission, and I had a lovely dress and hat for the occasion.

Helen looked very sweet on her wedding-day. To my great disappointment she had refused to wear bridal array, but her grey travelling-dress and hat suited her perfectly.

I thought Mr. Seymour looked older—he was growing grey, and his shoulders were a little bowed, as though from continuous stooping over books ; but he seemed very happy. Mr. Pelham acted as his groomsman, and I noticed that after the ceremony he kept rather close to Miss Redford, and that she looked more cheerful when he talked to her.

Poor Miss Redford ! I am afraid it was rather a

trying day to her ; and yet I knew that she rejoiced in Helen's happiness, and had done all in her power to further it in the most unselfish way. Of course, her feelings were a little mixed ; and once or twice I saw her look at Helen a little sadly and wistfully, and then Mr. Pelham said something to her in an undertone that made her smile again.

I was just looking at a beautiful little picture of the Burford children, in a quiet corner behind a big palm, when I heard Helen's voice close to me. She was speaking to her husband.

'Has the carriage come for us, Hamlyn ? I thought we were not to start until three ?'

'No ; we have another twenty minutes, so stay where you are, love. I want to look at my wife for a moment. Nell, is this real, or am I in a dream ? I don't believe that I am never to be a lonely beggar again.'

I heard Helen laugh her pretty, crisp laugh. He had taken her left hand, and was looking at the wedding-ring.

'No ; I shall always be there to take care of you,' she returned softly, and then I managed to glide unperceived out of my corner.

Miss Redford was still talking to Mr. Pelham. I thought he did not look quite so ugly that day. He had rather a nice voice, and he seemed talking very eagerly about some book he was reading. 'You must read it, Claudia,' I heard him say as I passed.

'Claudia' ! They were great friends, I knew ; but I never guessed that they were so intimate that he called her by her Christian name. But they were both of them too much engrossed with each other to notice me ; so I hastened to join Cicely Burford, who

was beckoning to me from the other end of the room.

She made me sit down beside her, and admired my frock, which she said was 'chic,' whatever that meant, and very smart. General Fabian, an old family friend of the Redfords, was standing just behind us with Dr. Burford, and I heard him say in his jovial manner, "Evil communications corrupt good manners"; do you think Claudia means to follow Helen's bad example—eh, Burford? It looks uncommonly like it. It will be beggars all, and no mistake.'

I do not know what Dr. Burford would have answered, but Cicely looked back at them smilingly and told them not to talk nonsense; but General Fabian refused to be silenced.

'Pelham is a clever fellow, though he is a bit of a stick at the War Office. He ought to have gone in for literature.'

But Cicely moved away. She seemed afraid of what he might say next; so she hunted Helen out of her easy corner, and took her up to the nursery to bid the children good-bye; and though she was only going to Ventnor for a fortnight, little Effie and Coralie hung about her, and gave her dozens of kisses—even baby Walter clamoured to go to dear Aunt Nellie.

We spent the remainder of the day at Twyford Lodge, and after dinner we drove home, and Mr. Pelham escorted us. Miss Redford had insisted on sleeping at the flat that night, though Cicely had begged her with tears in her eyes to remain with them; but I think Miss Redford wanted to be quite alone.

'When I am unhappy,' she said to me once, 'I prefer my own company to any other person's; friends

are very ready with their sympathy and advice, but it is sometimes wiser to take counsel with oneself.'

I am not sure that Miss Redford acted for the best that night; the little flat without Helen must have been very dismal. Although Mrs. Brant had made up a grand fire and left everything comfortable, she owned that she slept badly, and that the night seemed long; and that was perhaps why her head ached and her eyes looked so heavy the next morning. But nothing would induce her to take another holiday; she said I had wasted too much time already with my long illness. That was the worst of Miss Redford—she never spared either herself or other people when there was any work to be done.

CHAPTER IX

THE CORNER ROOM

Then I thought that others were standing by ;
' Ah, yes,' they said, ' it was even so !
Childhood is over, hope is high ;
We must sail in that ship we know not whither.'

JEAN INGELOW.

Trust is the best of relationships.—*Teaching of Buddha.*

I HAD a great surprise and pleasure on my fourteenth birthday.

Easter fell very early that year, and I returned from my spring visit to Bayfield on the eve of my birthday. Sydney was with me. I had begged father, as a great favour, to allow me to invite her for a week or two, and he had given me permission very readily ; but Cousin Yvonne had hesitated, as though she were unwilling to part with her.

' It will be a pity for Sydney to leave her studies,' she observed ; for Sydney was attending some excellent classes at a school almost a mile and a half from Bayfield. The masters came from London, and though the terms were high, the girls had great advantages. In fine weather Sydney used to cycle over to Woodmancot, and in the afternoon Cousin Yvonne would often drive over to fetch her. She spared no trouble

or expense on Sydney's education, and she thought herself well repaid by the girl's gratitude and devotion to her adopted mother. Sydney was secretly longing for the treat, but with great magnanimity she refused to say a word; but I was not so unselfish, and I urged my point rather persistently.

'Oh, do let me have her, Cousin Yvonne,' I had pleaded. 'It is my birthday, remember, and I never have any girls of my own age to stay with me, and it will be such fun,' and then Cousin Yvonne reluctantly yielded.

'It must be only for a fortnight, then, and she must come back to her day,' she said very decidedly; and of course we both faithfully promised to be satisfied with this condition.

Cousin Yvonne gave me her present before I left. It was a very handsome one—a gold bangle set with small diamonds. Aunt Cosie shook her head when I showed it to her. 'It is very extravagant of Yvonne,' she observed; 'you are far too young to wear such expensive jewellery'; for Aunt Cosie was very old-fashioned in her ideas. She had scolded father quite severely when he gave me a beautiful string of pearls, and advised me to put them aside until I was older, but I could not be induced to do this.

Father received Sydney very kindly. We both dined with him that night, and I could see by his manner that he was very much pleased with her.

'Miss Herbert is just the sort of friend I like you to have, Gipsy,' he said, when Sydney had retired to her room, and I had gone down again to wish him good-night. 'She is so simple and natural, but there is plenty of life in her. Your Cousin Yvonne must have taken great pains with her.'

'Do you think her pretty, father?' I asked, and he said at once that she was very bonnie-looking, and in another year or two she would be exceedingly good-looking; and, as father was a judge of beauty, this opinion quite satisfied me. But the next moment he turned my thoughts in another direction, for to my great pleasure he told me that for the future he would expect me always to be with him at late dinner. 'Your Aunt Cosie wanted me to put it off for another year,' he went on; 'but I do not see why we should be deprived of the pleasure of each other's society. I will dine half-an-hour earlier, and that will give me a longer evening.'

I was so delighted with this unexpected privilege that I could scarcely sleep for excitement. I knew very well that, but for Aunt Cosie's advice, father would always have had me with him; but she and Mardie had persuaded him that the late meal would be bad for me, and that I was growing and needed rest. I do not think Mardie was quite satisfied in her own mind that father was doing the right thing, but she would not have said so for worlds, and she took a good deal of pleasure in preparing my evening frocks. Father always liked me to wear white. He used often to take a flower from one of the vases on the dinner-table and tuck it into my frock. 'White suits you, Gipsy, but you want a touch of colour to finish you off,' he would say rather critically.

Sydney overslept herself and was a little late the next morning, but I found father standing by the breakfast table, looking with amused eyes at all the parcels and letters. The Redfords and Aunt Cosie and the servants always remembered me, and two or three old family friends; but, to my surprise, father's

present was not among them. His eyes twinkled as he saw my mystification. 'No, I have not forgotten you, Gip, but my gift is so unwieldy in size that it could not well be brought into the dining-room. I think we had better wait until we have finished breakfast, and then you and Miss Herbert shall give me your opinion.'

I was not at all disposed to wait, but I knew father would rather have his breakfast quietly, and though I was not as hungry as usual, I found plenty of occupation in opening my parcels and letters. There was actually one from Cousin Yvonne, although we had only left her the previous afternoon; but I was thankful when father pushed aside his coffee-cup and told us both to follow him.

'It is on the first floor,' he said in a teasing voice, 'and I have got it safe under lock and key'; and to my surprise he proceeded to unlock the door of a room next to his own, which to my knowledge had never been used. We called it the corner room, and it had a nice view of the garden and the river. Mardie always said it was the best room in the house, but the dark, heavy furniture and great bed never pleased me.

Father behaved in a very absurd manner. He would insist on tying his handkerchief over my eyes before he would allow me to cross the threshold, and then he took hold of my arm and led me in; but when he removed the bandage I was too much astonished to speak.

For I was in a strange and most charming room—full of things I had never seen before in my life,—a room tasteful and pretty enough for a young princess, and yet adapted to the needs of growing womanhood. The dainty cretonne hangings to the brass bedstead

were just my taste, and the furniture, though modern and up-to-date, seemed exactly to suit the room. Nothing had been forgotten ; there was a writing-table with its pretty appendages, and a delightful couch, and the easy-chair by the window was distinctly inviting. There was even a cabinet for my books, and two or three lovely engravings which father had chosen and had framed for me ; and it was all so beautiful and so unexpected that I could find no words to thank him.

‘Oh fie, Gipsy! tears on your birthday ; what will Miss Herbert think of us?’ but I could not help crying a little, and I am sure Sydney understood. It was not so much the surprise and pleasure—though I never had been more astonished and delighted in my life,—but it was the tender thought for my comfort that thus overcame me and which made me cling to father in speechless gratitude.

‘Oh, it is too much, too much!’ I sobbed ; ‘and you have never been away at all, then, except for the week-end’ ; for the two or three notes I had had from him had been written from the Métropole at Brighton, and how could I have guessed that he had spent most of the week in town to superintend the workmen. Even before I left home I knew one or two rooms on the first floor were being whitewashed and painted, but at that time I took little heed of household affairs.

I think father was satisfied with the result of his plan, and when I got calm we went round the room arm-in-arm and inspected everything. He told me that Miss Redford had helped him a good deal and that she had excellent taste.

‘I always meant you to have this room, Gipsy,’ he said ; ‘I was only waiting until you were old enough to appreciate it. I am afraid Mrs. Marland did not

want to part with you, but I told her that I must have you near me,' and father had that nice look in his eyes as he said this which always made me feel how dear I was to him.

I had never had such a birthday as that: in the afternoon father drove us in his phaeton to Richmond Park, and Miss Redford came to dinner; and after coffee father came up into the drawing-room and we played round games, and Sydney was the life of the party.

Sydney and I spent a very happy fortnight. Miss Redford came every morning, and if the weather permitted we started for some pleasant expedition or other. Sydney knew little of London; we took her to St. Paul's and the Tower, and the Zoological Gardens, and the Kensington Museum; and once father came home to luncheon, and we all, Miss Redford included, went to a matinee. I think we enjoyed that most of all. The late dinners and our cosy evenings in the library were also delightful. Sydney once said rather mischievously that I was more the little Princess than ever, 'for you have quite a grand air, Githa,' she observed merrily, 'when you sit at the head of the table.'

Father and Sydney soon became good 'friends. 'He is a dear man,' she said to me on the last evening, 'and he just worships the ground you walk on, Githa,' and Sydney gave a soft little sigh as she spoke; for it is always sad when a girl is unable to reverence the memory of her parent, and Sydney's father had only brought trouble to his family.

Sydney owned frankly that she was sorry when her visit came to an end, but she confessed, at the same time, that she had been idle long enough. 'I

must work all the harder for my holiday,' she observed sensibly, 'and I shall look forward to August'; but for all her bright philosophy Sydney did not like bidding me good-bye. She was becoming much attached to me in a sisterly way, and I returned her affection very warmly.

The next two years passed quietly and pleasantly. As I grew older I worked more diligently at my studies. Miss Redford still came each day, but I had a music master and attended drawing and dancing classes, and some excellent lectures on Literature and Church History. Miss Redford always accompanied me. Later on, by her advice, I joined French and German conversation classes, which were held every Wednesday afternoon by two ladies, Mademoiselle Durant and Fräulein Sonnenschein, who lived together in a tiny flat in Chelsea.

These conversation classes were very informal and original. The number of young ladies never exceeded six or eight; the room would not have accommodated a larger number. One Wednesday Fräulein Sonnenschein presided, and the conversation was in German; on the alternate Wednesday Mademoiselle Durant chattered to us in choice Parisian French, while we sipped *café au lait* and ate little crisp cakes flavoured with cinnamon. We all enjoyed these little gatherings and soon forgot our shyness. Mademoiselle had a knack of interesting us in some subject; we were none of us allowed to be silent. If the conversation languished she would start a sort of round game. She would commence a simple pathetic story, and just as we were becoming interested in it she would break off with a nod, for the young lady sitting next her to take up the thread. How we used to laugh and stumble and flounder through

the few sentences we were compelled to say, but we became more fluent after a time; indeed, more than once I forgot myself in the joy of narration, and only stopped when a little murmur of applause ran through the circle.

Mademoiselle clapped her little brown hands: 'C'est magnifique; Mademoiselle Darnell est une véritable raconteuse,' she said in her thin, shrill voice.

When I was sixteen Sydney and I had a wonderful treat, for Cousin Yvonne took us to Switzerland for six weeks, and we spent two or three days in Paris. We were both wild with excitement beforehand, but we never guessed what the realisation would be. I do not know how Sydney felt, but I was in a dream of enjoyment from morning to night. Cousin Yvonne used to look at me with a strange little smile.

'It is good to be young, Githa,' she said once. 'You are very happy, are you not, my dear?'

'Oh yes,' I sighed. 'I am having such a glorious time, I feel as though I could never love you enough, Cousin Yvonne, for giving us this pleasure'; but I wondered why Cousin Yvonne looked at me so seriously and turned away.

One day when I was in one of my wild moods—I had caught hold of Sydney and made her waltz with me over the parquet floor of the big saloon—I saw Cousin Yvonne watching us, and when we stopped breathless and glowing with exercise, she called us a pair of silly children. 'I don't believe Githa will ever be a grown-up, sedate young lady,' she continued; but I confuted this with much eagerness.

'I shall be seventeen next April,' I returned with dignity. 'You will see that I shall be quite grown up by then, Cousin Yvonne,' I returned grandly.

But I was very much surprised when she said almost passionately, 'I wish with all my heart you were still little, Githa, and that you need never grow up.' And then with a laugh, in which some bitterness was infused, she continued, 'No, I am not mad, dear child, but I know life somewhat dilutes the sunshine and brings troubles. But there, it is no use wishing for the impossible: you will have to dree your weird, Githa; be happy and free from care as long as you can, and may those days be far away indeed when you will say to yourself, "I have no pleasure in them."' Cousin Yvonne's eyes wore a sad look in them as she said this.

Mr. Dennison, the vicar of Bayfield, had died early in the spring, and his successor took up his residence in the vicarage while we were in Switzerland. I did not go to Bayfield for the last fortnight of my visit. Cousin Yvonne decided to go to Folkestone for the remainder of my holiday; she thought Bayfield would seem unusually quiet after all our excitement, and I daresay she was right; but I was a little curious about the new vicar, and I was sorry to miss Thurston, but Sydney told me that he and Lady Wilde had gone to Scotland and that St. Helen's Towers was empty.

I learnt a great deal about the new vicar in Sydney's and Cousin Yvonne's letters.

'The Reverend Paul Carlyon is rather an imposing and striking-looking person,' Sydney wrote. 'Aunt Yvonne and I saw him at the school this morning, and he introduced himself to us, and was quite pleasant and friendly. Aunt Yvonne thinks he has such a nice manner. He is grey-haired, but his face is not at all old; Aunt Yvonne is sure that he is not forty. He is very alert and active-looking; one could almost take

him for an army chaplain, he has quite a martial carriage. But there, Aunt Yvonne is calling me, and I must fly. Good-bye, Princess, to be continued in my next.'

Sydney generally wrote once a week, and I waited anxiously for her next letter. Cousin Yvonne had simply mentioned that Mr. Carlyon was a good preacher, and that his sermon on the previous Sunday had been exactly suited to his congregation.

'He is very straight and simple,' she went on, and there is no seeking for effect; he has a message to deliver, and there is no beating about the bush. I should think he has plenty of common sense, and that he is very much in earnest,' and this was high praise from Cousin Yvonne.

Sydney's next letter gave me more personal details. Mr. Carlyon was a widower, his wife had died two years ago, and he had two children, a boy and girl.

'They are twins, and such delightful little creatures,' wrote Sydney; 'they are about four years old, I believe. The girl reminds me a little of you, Githa, or rather of your picture as a child; she has the sweetest little gipsy face and dark eyes, and she is always laughing; and the boy is such a pretty little fellow; and they have such a nice nurse. I am sure you would delight in these children, Githa, you are such a baby lover, and all the village infants take to you.

'Mr. Carlyon looks rather old to be their father; but Aunt Yvonne says I am writing nonsense, and that he is not really old, and she says it is delightful to see him with his children. Do you know, Githa, his wife was the daughter of an Irish earl, that the family were very poor and proud, and that her father was very angry when Lady Doreen refused a grand match to

marry Mr. Carlyon. Lady Wilde, who had seen her, said she was very pretty and amiable, and that the family were so poor that they lived in a corner of the castle, and that they had scarcely money enough to keep up appearances'; and here Sydney broke off with a declaration that she had really no more time for gossip.



CHAPTER X

ROY AND I GO DOWN TO BAYFIELD

That was the voyage of life, good sooth,
The voyage of life set forth to me
In a dream. Am I ready? Nay, in truth,
Not ready. Yet childhood is over, youth
Is come. I must sail to that great sea,
And knew it not; but my prayer awake
Pleads in the prayer of sleep
Some part to take.

JEAN INGELow.

I HAD a strange sort of half-waking dream on the eve of my seventeenth birthday, which made a curious impression on my mind.

There is no doubt that I must have been asleep, and yet the dream was so vivid that it was difficult for me to realise this.

I thought that I was sitting on the balcony outside our drawing-room window looking down on the river. It was a lovely spring evening, and I was admiring, as I so often did, the golden lights on the water. The western sky was softly flushed with pink, and a little boat with a tawny sail floated past. There was a man and a dog on the deck, and I distinctly heard the dog bark.

'After all, the world is a beautiful place,' I said

to myself. 'I am glad I am only seventeen, and have so many years before me'; but even as I spoke a sudden cloud blotted out the river and the sunset, and the darkness of night seemed to enfold me. I was just going to rise from my seat, in my terror, when a voice behind me said, 'The child is a woman now, and it is only right that she should know. I shall hold you to your promise.' It was my father's voice; but what more he would have said it was impossible to know, for at that moment I woke and found myself safely in bed in the corner room; but my heart was beating very quickly, and it was some time before I could go to sleep again, so great was my terror at that sudden darkness.

I have had many strange dreams since then, which I have told to Mentor, although he always laughed at them, and called me a superstitious little heathen. But it never entered my head to tell that dream to father. Perhaps if I had done so, it would not have haunted me so persistently.

I was always rather imaginative and impressionable, and it struck me as a curious coincidence that the chapter for my devotional reading that morning should be the Transfiguration on Mount Tabor. Somehow I never realised so fully before those words, 'And they feared as they entered into the cloud.' There was something so human in their terror; they found themselves confronted by unintelligible mysteries, and blinded by unearthly light, and then came darkness. Poor, simple, ignorant disciples, how relieved they must have been when they found themselves alone with the beloved Master again. I thought father looked at me once or twice in his keen way as we sat at breakfast, as though to read the cause of my unusual gravity.

'You are dreadfully grown up this morning, Gipsy,' he said at last. 'You make me feel quite old. I wish you could have had your dear friend Sydney Herbert with you longer'; but I assured him truthfully that I did not really mind, as I was going down to Bayfield in a day or two.

'Sydney was very sorry to refuse,' I went on, 'but she did not like leaving Cousin Yvonne, for Cousin Yvonne had taken cold, and seemed so unwell and depressed that Sydney had not the heart to leave her.'

I explained all this to father, and he seemed to understand; and then he told me that I had better be quick over my breakfast, as his present was waiting for my inspection. But this time I knew what was awaiting me, for father had always promised that I should have a horse of my own on my seventeenth birthday. The previous year he had given me a beautiful little Yorkshire terrier — Roy, we had christened him, and he was my faithful little companion night and day. He always slept in my room; and as Cousin Yvonne's favourite, Fiddle, had departed this life, Roy was allowed to accompany me to Prior's Cot, where he speedily made himself at home. He trotted after me as usual when we went to the front door to welcome my new favourite, Bab.

She was a very pretty creature, with a dark glossy brown coat and a small head, and she was as playful as a kitten, though with no vice in her. Indeed, she received me very kindly, and took several lumps of sugar out of my hand, and only nuzzled me for more when I patted her sleek side.

Father had taken a whole holiday, and we rode in the Park most of the morning. I had ridden before with him there, but on that day I had a new habit

and felt unusually smart. I noticed people looked at us a great deal, but I thought they were admiring Bab and Sultan.

We had tea that afternoon with Aunt Cosie; but we could not stay long, as father had promised to take me to the theatre that evening, and we were to dine earlier than usual.

Mardie helped me to dress. I think she loved the task; and she always brushed my hair at night, and came in the last thing to tuck me up and see that I was comfortable; and though I was a grown-up young lady and the mistress of my father's house, I should not have rested half so well without her loving kiss and blessing.

Mardie had selected my prettiest dress because it was my birthday. It was a soft, cream-coloured silk, and before I came downstairs I paused for a moment to regard myself in the big glass that hung on the landing. I wanted to know how I looked on my seventeenth birthday.

No, it was no longer the child Githa; but it was still the same brown oval little face, with thoughtful dark eyes and masses of ruddy-brown hair which seemed to wave and curl at its own sweet will in spite of all mine and Mardie's efforts; but though I still bore my pet name Gipsy, my arms and neck were as fair as Sydney's, and my pearl necklace was still my favourite ornament. To please father I had one or two crimson roses fastened on my bodice; a friend had sent me a box of hot-house flowers, and I had put these aside for the evening. Cousin Yvonne had given me a second bangle still handsomer than the first, and I felt a girlish satisfaction when father came out of his room and joined me, for I saw his look of

approval, though he pretended to twit me with my vanity.

But I was not admiring myself; I was only curious to know if I really appeared grown up. Father always looked so handsome and distinguished in evening dress that I longed to do him credit. I managed to convey this to him rather bashfully; and he assured me seriously that he was quite satisfied with my appearance, and would not have me look otherwise for the world, and I am sure he meant it.

Two or three days after this I went down to Bayfield. Mardie escorted me as usual. She was going to stay with a cousin at Henley, and would go on in the train. Sydney had promised to meet me at the station. As she was over eighteen her education was practically completed; but by cousin Yvonne's advice she still attended the French and German classes. She also had singing lessons, and was fast developing a very pretty voice. Roy sat opposite us in the railway carriage, with the sun shining on his golden head. He was grinning at us with sheer delight, and showing his little pearly teeth in the sweetest way. Roy was not fidgety and restless like some dogs when they are travelling. He was very well bred and trained, and always behaved like a gentleman; only, when he caught sight of Sydney he quivered from head to tail with repressed excitement.

I think father would have called Sydney bonnie if he had seen her that day. She was rather tall, and I always felt short beside her, though father said I was exactly the right height for a woman.

'I am afraid you are still growing,' he observed somewhat ruefully, which was the truth, for I did not attain my proper height until I was eighteen.

Sydney was certainly a very pretty girl. Her bright, healthy colouring, and her frank, candid expression, were very attractive, and then she had such beautiful Irish grey eyes with long dark lashes. We had greeted each other affectionately before I saw that she was not alone, for a dark, good-looking young man, standing a few steps behind her, raised his hat and smiled at me, and then I saw it was Thurston Wilde. I had not seen him for more than a year, and for the moment I had not recognised him.

To my amusement I discovered that he had been also taken aback at my grown-up appearance, and though he seemed pleased to see me, and said so quite nicely, he was rather shy with me, and hesitated perceptibly before he called me by my name; but I was not going to be stiff with my old playfellow because he had grown into a handsome and striking young man, and my friendliness thawed him, and we were soon chatting in our old way. Thurston had his dogs with him—a beautiful red-brown setter, and a large bull-terrier, who alarmed me excessively by sniffing round Roy in rather a contemptuous way; but Thurston assured me that he was only making friendly overtures, and that he was the most good-natured fellow in the world.

'Ben never hurts small dogs. You need not be afraid, Githa,' he protested, as I tucked Roy under my arm; 'better let them make friends at once,' and then I acted on this advice. Thurston seemed very proud of his new acquisition, and he tried hard to make me admire Ben; but bull-terriers were not to my liking, and though Ben's coat was as white and glossy as satin, I objected to his broad, blunt nose and the ridiculous pink rims to his eyes, and I patted his bullet

head reluctantly because Thurston expected me to do so ; but I made amends by my praises of my old friend Laddie, who was such a beautiful creature and so gentle and affectionate, and Thurston had had him from a puppy.

The luggage had been put on the carriage by this time, and we were about to follow, when Thurston said suddenly, 'There is the vicar, Sydney ; I think he is coming across to speak to us.' And he was right, for the next moment Sydney had shaken hands with him and was introducing him to me.

Sydney's description of Mr. Carlyon had given me the impression that he was a grey-haired boy ; but this idea was wrong, there was nothing boyish about the Rev. Paul Carlyon. He was a man in the prime of life, and might probably be two- or three-and-forty. It was only his grey hair which made people think him older. He had rather a thin brown face and dark eyes, and his normal expression was somewhat grave ; but his smile and voice were exceedingly pleasant.

'I have heard a great deal of you from your friend Miss Herbert,' he said, as we shook hands, 'and I knew you were expected to-day' ; and then he added, 'Miss Herbert is one of my best workers, so, of course, I have a great respect for her.'

Sydney laughed and blushed a little.

'I teach in the Sunday School now, Githa,' she observed ; 'you must come with me next Sunday and see my class—such dear little children. But we really must not linger any longer, Aunt Yvonne will be looking out for us.' At this broad hint Mr. Carlyon put us into the carriage. I noticed that both he and Thurston stood outside the station looking after us until we were nearly out of sight.

'Well, what do you think of the new vicar?' asked Sydney in an interested voice.

'Oh, I am sure I shall like him,' was my impulsive answer. 'He is a very uncommon sort of person, and perhaps a little formidable at first sight, but he is undeniably a gentleman, and he has such a very pleasant manner.'

'That is what Aunt Yvonne says; she has taken to him and likes him immensely. She says it is a pleasure to talk to him, he is so well informed and so broad-minded; she declares that he preaches the gospel of common sense—you know what funny things Aunt Yvonne says sometimes; but his sermons are always so simple and practical, and seem to help one so nicely.'

This was very satisfactory; but I was not inclined to discuss sermons just then, so I turned the conversation into another channel.

'What a handsome fellow Thurston Wilde is,' I observed so abruptly that Sydney gave a little start. 'He was always a good-looking boy; but he is really quite striking with his clear olive complexion and dark eyes: there was always something rather foreign about him.'

'His mother was Andalusian; I suppose that accounts for it. Yes, every one thinks Thurston very handsome.' Sydney spoke rather hurriedly. 'By-the-bye, Githa, I forgot to tell you that we are all to dine at St. Helen's Towers to-morrow. Lady Wilde fixed the evening nearly a week ago. Mr. Carlyon is also invited.'

I was rather pleased at this piece of intelligence, although Lady Wilde was not a favourite of mine. I always agreed with Cousin Yvonne that she was

extremely limited in her ideas ; but it would be pleasant to meet Thurston and Mr. Carlyon. I always, during my visits to Bayfield, spent an evening at St. Helen's Towers with Cousin Yvonne and Sydney, but only the last three years I had been invited to take my place at the dinner-table. Sydney dined there constantly, and was a great favourite with Lady Wilde.

'Will Cousin Yvonne be well enough to go?' I asked. 'You told me in your last letter that she was still very poorly.'

'I am afraid that is true,' replied Sydney ; 'but her cold is certainly better, and I know she intends to go. I can't think what ails Aunt Yvonne, she is so depressed and unlike herself, only she does not like me to notice it.'

I was very sorry to hear this. I knew Sydney never exaggerated things. Cousin Yvonne's constitution was very strong and she rarely ailed anything ; her quiet life and active habits were all in her favour ; but I had noticed something strained and forced in her letters lately, as though writing were an effort, and they had certainly seemed less cheerful than usual.

Cousin Yvonne was not in the porch to receive me, but she waved to me from the drawing-room window, and as I ran into the hall she was standing smiling in the doorway.

'Was your train late, Githa?' she asked. 'I have been looking out for the last half-hour'; and I told her that Mr. Carlyon and Thurston had detained us at the station. 'I think I was ten minutes late,' I finished.

Cousin Yvonne did not answer ; she was regarding me rather thoughtfully. Sydney was right, and she

looked far from well. She was thinner, and there were dark lines under her eyes. She wore a little wrap as though she had not quite thrown off her cold, and perhaps this made her look a little older, but, as usual, she made light of her indisposition.

'It was my own fault; you must not pity me, Githa. I got wet one damp day, and did not change my things at once when I came in. Mr. Carlyon was waiting to speak to us about a sick woman, and I could not leave until he had finished his business.'

'Yes, and Sydney told me that you refused to nurse yourself properly'; but Cousin Yvonne only smiled and said that she was always a bad patient and disliked lying in bed.

'A cold will have its way,' she went on. 'Of course it has pulled me down a little, and I feel unusually lazy, but I shall be able to go to St. Helen's Towers to-morrow evening.' And then she followed me to my room; but I would not let her stay and help me, for she looked far too white and tired for exertion.

We spent a delightful evening. Sydney sang to us, and I had so much to tell them about Helen Seymour's little girl, to whom Miss Redford and I had stood sponsors. Mr. Pelham was godfather, and Mrs. Kennedy had made the most magnificent christening cake, and we had had quite a festive evening in the little flat.

'Helen looked sweeter than ever with baby in her arms,' I continued. 'They are so very happy, Cousin Yvonne—only, of course, she has been obliged to give up her teaching; but Miss Redford thinks Mr. Seymour is getting on now, and they will soon be able to have a nice little house of their own.'

'And how does the other affair progress?' asked

Cousin Yvonne significantly, for it was an open secret to all their friends that there was some understanding between Miss Redford and Elmer Pelham. If they were not actually engaged, they were tolerably sure of each other. When Miss Redford and I spent an evening at the Burfords' he was always there, and he talked more to her than to any one else, and they always seemed so happy in each other's company. But Miss Redford was very reserved, and it was hardly likely that she would choose a girl of seventeen for her confidante. But, as Cousin Yvonne and Sydney knew, I was very much interested in what I termed the Claudian Romance.

CHAPTER XI

'FUNERALS AND ANGELS'

Come to me, O ye children !
And whisper in my ear
What the birds and the winds are saying
In your sunny atmosphere.

For what are all our contrivings,
And the wisdom of our books,
When compared with your caresses,
And the gladness of your looks.

LONGFELLOW.

My first morning at Bayfield was always spent in revisiting all my favourite haunts and looking up old friends. Cousin Yvonne had generally been my companion, but on this occasion Sydney accompanied me, as Cousin Yvonne thought it better to reserve herself for the evening. She was down to breakfast as usual, but her appearance pleased me even less than it had the previous night. She was certainly thinner and paler, and there was a heaviness about her eyes as though she had not slept. When I questioned her she answered rather reluctantly that she had not rested as well as usual, but she refused to be drawn into any discussion about her health. 'Of course I look old and faded beside your fresh young face,' she observed

with a faint smile ; ' comparisons are odious, Githa,'—and then she changed the subject by asking Sydney to do a little commission for her in the village.

I felt worried about Cousin Yvonne. She was evidently far from well, and very much out of spirits ; but it was no use asking her questions, it only vexed her. She was extremely reserved about herself, and was not always disposed for sympathy ; and yet no one could be kinder or more considerate of other people's ailments. I think she found it easier to sympathise with others than to accept pity or kindly offices for herself.

It is rather difficult to understand these strong, self-contained characters, but from a child I had always felt instinctively there were hidden depths in Cousin Yvonne's nature that no youthful plummet could sound, and this made me somewhat shy with her. I was disposed to argue the matter a little longer with Sydney, but she very wisely advised me to put all worrying thoughts out of my head and enjoy myself ; and just because the spring sunshine was so beautiful and the sap of youth ran so strongly through my veins, I found it wonderfully easy to follow this sensible advice, and we spent a delightful morning.

I was very kindly welcomed by my old friends, and received plenty of compliments, all expressed characteristically, from old Mrs. Tippet's ' You do be growed, surely, Miss, into quite a grand young lady,' to my prime favourite, Daniel Thoroughgood, who lifted his withered old hands with the exclamation, ' Bless my soul, Missie, if you aren't a sight for sore een ; she will make some hearts ache, for sure—won't she, old woman?' with a nod to his better half, who was busy at her washing-tub. But I only laughed as I

showed Daniel the pipe I had brought for him from London.

I always visited the church and the churchyard last. It was a lovely place, especially in early summer, when the roses that bordered the path leading from the vicarage garden were in full bloom. As I sat in the church I used to fancy the air that stole through the open windows brought their perfume. To me it was the ideal of a country churchyard, it was so quiet and secluded, and the graves were so well kept, and everywhere there were roses or clumps of Madonna lilies. Cousin Yvonne loved it too, for I heard her say more than once that she would rather be buried in Bayfield churchyard than in any other place. 'I should like to feel that all my old friends and neighbours would give me a kindly thought as they passed—and then so often there are little children playing there—and the birds and the bees and the butterflies love it.' I remembered Cousin Yvonne's speech as we unlatched the gate leading from the village, for the first sight that met my eyes were two small children sticking half-withered flowers in a newly made grave—a mere mound of brown earth.

'Why, these are the twins,' exclaimed Sydney in an amused voice; 'we must go and see what they are doing. They are very fond of playing in the churchyard, but they are not generally alone.' And then we made our way to them, but the little creatures were too busily absorbed to notice us; the little girl was evidently remonstrating with her brother.

'Silly boy,' she was saying, 'you ar'n't planting, you are frowning the poor flowers in by their heads. They won't grow neither.'

'Won't grow neither,' repeated the boy anxiously;

and then he looked up, and smiled as he saw Sydney. He was a pretty little fellow in a white sailor suit, and he looked younger than his sister. I remembered that Sydney had declared that little Stella reminded her of my childish portrait, but, except in a certain similarity of colouring, I could see no resemblance in the laughing face and roguish eyes before me. From the way Stella looked up at me from under her dark lashes, I guessed she was already a baby coquette, but she was a dimpled, bewitching little creature. The children welcomed Sydney with evident pleasure, and she hugged them impartially.

'Why are you alone, darlings?' she asked, when I had made friends with them.

Then Stella, who evidently took the lead, was very ready with her answer.

'Peace was busy, so Boy brought us, 'cos we wanted to play funerals and angels.'

'Wanted to play funerals,' echoed Cyril, who seemed rather parrot-like in his observations.

'And whose grave are you decorating, my sweet?' asked Sydney, trying to preserve her gravity, as she looked at the uncomfortable festoon of dilapidated blossoms, many of them waving unsightly stalks in the upper air.

'Poor old man, what Boy changed into an angel yesterday,' was the puzzling answer.

'Boy read over the black box, and old man went up and up and up, where no one but God could find him.'

'Old man went up and up,' murmured Cyril placidly; and then he added of his own accord, 'Paul made him into an angel.'

I was utterly mystified; and when she saw my

face, Sydney turned suddenly helpless with suppressed laughter, and was obliged to sit down on an adjoining tombstone.

She told me afterwards that the children were evidently alluding to a poor old tramp who had been taken ill at a cottage near, and had made rather an edifying end. The vicar had expressed his opinion that the poor wanderer had seen better days, and he had warmly commended the good Samaritans who had received him under their roof. Sydney, who had attended that humble funeral, had been much impressed by the good feeling of the villagers.

'The children were there with their nurse,' she continued, 'and they behaved quite nicely. But do you know, Githa, I believe those babies have got all sorts of queer ideas jumbled up in their little heads about their father and the funeral service. Stella seems to think that he has something to do with changing people into angels. Aunt Yvonne and I saw that old tramp the very day he entered the village—such a miserable, broken-down old creature he looked; and when Stella said just now, "Old man went up and up and up," it seemed just like a sort of glorified Jack-in-a-box'; and then we both went off into a fit of laughing, for really it was too comical. There is no knowing what curious ideas children get in their heads, and these little innocents evidently regarded their father as a miracle worker, and the funeral service as a sort of occult force for the transformation of dead men into angels.

Perhaps our laughter was demoralising, for Stella suddenly became pettish, and snatched the limp flowers out of Cyril's hot, dirty little hand.

'Tired of silly game,' she pouted; 'frow flowers

away.' And then looking up in my face, she asked coaxingly, 'Is you quite growed up, dear, like Herberts?'

This was rather a shock after all the compliments I had received that morning ; but I assured her modestly that I considered myself quite a grown-up young lady. My answer seemed to disappoint her.

'I thought you was only a big girl what played games and learned lessons,' she returned so dejectedly that I reassured her on the latter point.

'Oh, I still learn lessons, Stella,' for Miss Redford and I always read French or German for an hour every morning, and I still had my music and drawing masters, and attended the conversation classes ; Cousin Yvonne had begged me to continue my studies. 'People talk of a girl's education being finished at seventeen or eighteen,' she observed, 'as though a woman's education is ever ended. Some only learn their hardest lesson at the close of life.' And I certainly think she was right.

Stella looked a little happier after this admission. She sidled up to me in a confidential way. 'It is nice to be a big girl and play games. Boy is ever so much bigger than you and he 'vents lovely games.'

'Paul 'vents lovely games,' echoed Cyril with a seraphic smile. Then he jumped up with a cry of joy, 'There's Paul!' as the little gate leading from the Vicarage was quietly unlatched, and Mr. Carlyon came striding up the path between the rose-bushes, now covered with crinkly green leaves. There was something certainly martial in the man's bearing, and how silvery his closely-cropped grey head looked in the sunshine. It matched oddly with the thin brown face and vivid dark eyes. It was touching to see how the

two small children rushed at him, Stella clinging to his arm, and Cyril clasping his knee.

'Wait a moment, children, until I have paid my respects to these ladies'; and then he shook hands with us, though his movements were sadly impeded. The next moment with one hand he lifted Cyril to his shoulder and gave the other to Stella. 'Peace will be here directly,' he observed. Then Stella frowned and shook her curls in rather a mutinous fashion.

'Don't want Peace. Stay with Boy and 'vent new games.'

'Paul 'vent new games, imitated Cyril, holding tightly round his father's neck.

Mr. Carlyon smiled. 'I am afraid I spoil them, Miss Darnell; your cousin often lectures me. I have rather peculiar theories on the subject of infantine education. I like to give plenty of scope to children. Here comes one of your best friends,' as a tall, respectable-looking woman, with a singularly placid and prepossessing face, came quietly towards them. But Stella only tugged at her father's hand.

'Ain't got no bestest friends, Boy,' she observed crossly.

'Have you not, my star; that's bad hearing.' Then he set Cyril on his feet. 'Now then, once, twice, three times, and away'; and, as he clapped his hands, the children flew down the path and into Peace's outstretched arms.

'I wonned the race,' exclaimed Stella triumphantly, as Peace tucked her under one vigorous arm and the boy under the other, while a submerged voice gasped out, 'I wonned it too, Paul.'

'That always fetches them,' exclaimed Mr. Carlyon, as we walked towards the church. 'What do you

think of their nurse, Miss Darnell? To me she has one of the most restful faces I have ever seen; it certainly endorses her name.'

'Is Peace her Christian or surname?' I asked.

'Her Christian name—Peace Stephenson. She is a survival of an old Puritan family—Primitive Methodist I believe her father called himself; and all his five daughters had quaint names, savouring of Bunyan and the *Pilgrim's Progress*. I know there is a Prudence and Patience, as well as Charity, and I believe there is a Discretion too, though they abbreviated it for common use. Peace is the youngest, and I have thanked God for her from the day she entered my house.'

I thought it nice of Mr. Carlyon to say that and not to be ashamed of owning his blessings; people so often slur them over and gobble up their good things like greedy children who forget their grace; and indeed I had been much impressed by the pleasant comeliness of Peace as she stood so patiently in the sunshine waiting for her wayward charges, and the manner in which she opened her arms and took the little panting creatures to her heart made me feel that it was no hireling's love that was lavished on them.

We went into the little church, for Sydney wanted me to see the new alms-bags that she and Cousin Yvonne had worked for Easter; and as we stood there in the vestry we had quite a nice little talk about some of the old people in whom I was interested, and I soon discovered that Mr. Carlyon was interested too. He said he liked the people very much, they had received him so kindly. 'They seemed to know I had had trouble,' he continued simply, 'and indeed their homely sympathy was very healing'; and then a sad look came into his eyes, as though he was thinking of

the poor young wife and mother who lay in her quiet grave so many miles away.

Sydney had left us a few minutes previously, and we found her in the porch talking to Thurston Wilde. He had left his dog in the road outside, and had followed us; he looked handsomer than ever, although he had rather a worried expression. I think he was airing some grievance to Sydney, for as we all walked down the churchyard he dropped purposely behind and kept beside her. 'Gran is bent on having them, but it will spoil the evening,' I heard him say; but Sydney said something soothing in reply.

As Mr. Carlyon was unlatching the gate into the Vicarage garden, for he wished us to go out that way, we saw the children kissing their hands to us from an upper window.

'Miss Darnell,' he said suddenly, 'I am afraid my little people shocked you just now; but ever since she could speak Stella has called me Boy, and latterly Cyril persists in addressing me as Paul. I think he finds father rather difficult to enunciate, but they are such babies, and somehow I like it.'

I only smiled in answer to this. Mr. Carlyon was a stranger, and it would be hardly becoming in me to argue on such a personal matter. I was rather amused at his earnestness and desire to know my opinion, but I preferred to remain silent.

'You do not agree with me,' he persisted, and I was rather confused by his keen look. I saw then that he was determined to have my answer.

'I think the name of father is so beautiful,' I faltered; for all my life I had never called father by any other name, though my childlike tongue could hardly lisp it.

'I see what you mean,' he returned gravely, and I really believe he read my thoughts at that moment. 'You are afraid that my little ones will have less reverence than love; but I believe and hope that this will not be the case; when my boy is older I shall teach him to say father, and Stella will soon follow his example. They are the most original pair you ever saw,' with quite a boyish laugh. 'If you could only hear one of our Sunday talks!'

I was about to tell Mr. Carlyon about the tramp's grave, but Sydney ran after us. She was alone, and looked a little flushed as though she had hurried.

'You must really make haste, Githa,' she observed, 'or we shall be late for luncheon.' And then we bade Mr. Carlyon good-bye.

The children were still waving to us, and Stella had a black kitten cuddled up to her fat little neck. We talked about them most of the way to Prior's Cot, and I told Sydney how embarrassed I had been when the vicar had asked my opinion.

'I fancy people have been speaking to him about it,' returned Sydney, 'and that has made him a little sensitive. I am quite sure Lady Wilde has; she is always ready to give her opinion on every subject, and she never beats about the bush.'

'No, she can make herself extremely disagreeable sometimes. But I do hope, Sydney, that Mr. Carlyon did not mind what I said.'

'My dear child, how could he! After all, you are right, and there is nothing sweeter than the dear old names of father and mother.'

'But he seemed as though he read my thoughts, Sydney.'

'Well, dear, you have a very tell-tale face. I can

often guess what you are thinking about before you have said a word. Mr. Carlyon was afraid you were just a little shocked, so he was anxious to explain matters. Bless their little hearts, they are only babies, and I think they are just adorable with him.'

And then as we walked up the lane the church clock chimed the half-hour, and we both involuntarily quickened our steps.



CHAPTER XII

ST. HELEN'S TOWERS

Hasten [to examine] thy own ruling faculty and that of the universe and that of thy neighbour; thy own, that thou mayst make it just; and that of the universe, that thou mayst remember of what thou art a part; and that of thy neighbour, that thou mayst know whether he has acted ignorantly or with knowledge, and that thou mayst also consider that his ruling faculty is akin to thine.—M. AURELIUS ANTONINUS.

WE were half-way through luncheon when I suddenly remembered that I had not asked Sydney why Thurston had looked so worried. She seemed surprised at my question, and coloured a little as though she were unwilling to answer it. 'It was about the Etheridges,' she returned slowly; 'they are back at the Mount, and Lady Wilde has invited Colonel Etheridge and Rhona to dinner to-night—Mrs. Etheridge never goes out in the evening.'

I was quite aware of this. Mrs. Etheridge was a chronic invalid; but of late years the family had spent the winter abroad and were very little at Bayfield. They were extremely wealthy people, and Rhona, being an only child, would be quite an heiress. Lady Wilde had always been on intimate terms with the Etheridges, and she took a great deal of notice of Rhona. She was a nice, ladylike girl, and Sydney and I both liked

her, but Thurston always seemed indifferent to her society. She was certainly not at all pretty, she was rather colourless and insignificant in appearance, though by no means plain, but Thurston, who had his own ideas on the subject of genuine beauty, always said that she was insipid.

'It is silly of Thurston to make such a fuss about a trifle,' went on Sydney, 'but he will have it the evening will be spoiled; he was quite out of humour about it, foolish fellow!'

I guessed the reason of Thurston's vexation when I heard this. Lady Wilde would insist on Rhona sitting beside her grandson, and she was too quiet to be an amusing companion; probably he had hoped for Sydney's society during the long elaborate dinner.

He and Sydney were great friends. I was still very much interested in my old playmate, but I had long ago got rid of my childish jealousy, and had resigned myself to the knowledge that Sydney was the prime favourite.

Thurston was always very nice to me, and I secretly admired him, for he was an exceedingly good-looking fellow; but my feelings for him were purely platonic and sisterly. I liked to be with him, even though I saw how ready he was to turn from me to Sydney. I knew that he told her all his troubles and grievances, and that her sympathy never failed him. Circumstances were always throwing them together, and a day rarely passed that they did not meet either at Prior's Cot or St. Helen's. Lady Wilde thought us all children, and I do not think it entered her head that any troublesome complications could arise from the situation. She was not a clever woman, but there were times when her denseness

surprised me. She was extremely injudicious and short-sighted with regard to her grandson. Thurston had not been to any public school or to the University; he had been placed with a tutor, where he had only had the companionship of half-a-dozen boys of his own age; and though he was fairly well educated as far as classical studies went, he was entirely deficient in the wider knowledge of human nature and the world, and, as Cousin Yvonne once expressed it, 'very badly equipped for the battle of life.'

Thurston was just one-and-twenty. His education had been completed by a few months spent on the Continent under the care of an elderly tutor, who did his best to improve his pupil's mind, but who certainly failed to interest him; and Thurston returned home satiated with mountains and lakes and churches and picture-galleries, and utterly bored and *blasé*.

'What was the good of mountains if one was not allowed to climb them,' he said once to me. 'I give you my word, Githa, I felt like a tame bear being lugged about by my keeper, only I did not even dance as poor Bruin does in the market-place. I daresay,' he continued gloomily, 'that Sydney is right and that old Cathcart was not such a bad sort of fellow after all; but you see a cub needs the companionship of other cubs to make things lively,' and Thurston gave vent to a bitter little laugh.

Sydney had to practise her singing after luncheon, so Cousin Yvonne and I made ourselves cosy in the drawing-room. She lay back in her easy-chair, idle for once, and bade me a little abruptly talk to her.

'I am in a lazy mood this afternoon,' she observed, 'so you may talk of what you will—cabbages or kings—there is a wide range of subjects between the two.'

I laughed at this ; but my head was just then full of Thurston's grievance about the Etheridges, so I commenced with him.

'Cousin Yvonne,' I remarked, 'I do so wonder what Thurston will do with himself now his education is finished ; there is so little going on at Bayfield.'

'It is odd that you should say that,' she returned, smiling, for Sydney and I were talking on that very subject the other night. 'It does seem such a grievous pity that Lady Wilde will not allow him to go to Oxford.'

'But what is her reason ?' I asked brusquely, for my private opinion of Lady Wilde was not specially flattering, and, moreover, I had spoken of her to Sydney as an opinionative, crotchety old woman. Then Cousin Yvonne looked rather grave.

'Her reason is rather a sad one, Githa, and although I do not in the least approve of the way she has brought up Thurston, I can understand her point of view.

'Lady Wilde has had a great deal of trouble in her life. I believe her married life was not happy. Sir Joseph—he was only knighted for gallantry—certainly married her for her money, and though he tried to hide this from her she soon found it out for herself. It was a very ill-assorted union, and he grew more indifferent and more neglectful of her comfort every year, and so the breach widened.'

I had no idea of this, but I remained silent, and Cousin Yvonne went on. 'They had only one son, Thurston's father. His name was Manley, and he was quite as good-looking as his son, though not so dark ; but Thurston takes after his mother. Lady Wilde was bound up in her son ; she literally worshipped the

ground he walked on ; nothing was too good for him ; he must have an education fit for a prince. He was sent to Eton, and then to Christ Church, where he got into a bad set. I know Sir Joseph paid his debts more than once ; and then something happened, I do not know what, and he had to leave Oxford in disgrace. I heard all this from my old friend Mr. Dennison, for Lady Wilde has never mentioned either her husband or son to me.'

'She has had trouble,' I returned rather grudgingly.

'But I have not finished my story yet, Githa. When his university career came to an end, Manley was sent round the world with a tutor. Sir Joseph thought a year's absence would be wise under the circumstances, and that he would come home and start afresh.

'Lady Wilde was very loath to part with him, and Sir Joseph had hard work to persuade her to give her consent. She told Mr. Dennison that she had a presentiment that some evil would come to him. But she had great confidence in the tutor that had been selected, and I believe that neither she nor Sir Joseph ever blamed him for what happened.

'It was in America that they fell in with a young Spanish lady who was travelling with her brother. The tutor, Mr. Tressiter, found out that they belonged to a dramatic company. The brother was in bad health, and the sister, who was apparently devoted to the invalid, was extremely handsome. But her manner was so coquettish and so free and easy that Mr. Tressiter grew alarmed for his pupil, who he saw was strongly attracted by the young actress's beauty.

'He determined to leave the hotel at once, but the young man flatly refused to accompany him. There was more than one uncomfortable scene before he

could induce his contumacious pupil to finish his packing, but he yielded at last, and their departure was arranged for the next morning.

'You may imagine Mr. Tressiter's feelings when Manley failed to put in an appearance the next morning. Señorita Bianca and her brother had left the previous afternoon, and it was far too probable that the misguided boy had followed them; but so cleverly had he laid his plans that it was weeks before his tutor could find him, and then it was too late. Bianca had married him.

'Mr. Dennison always declared that the trouble and worry killed Sir Joseph. It was a terrible affair, Githa. Bianca was an impossible woman, and, though Manley brought her to England, Lady Wilde refused to see her, and it was only after her death that Manley was allowed to return home with his child.

'He was in bad health then, a perfect wreck, and he did not live long. On his deathbed he besought his mother to be good to the boy. "The little chap will make up to you for all the trouble I have given you, mother," he said, and these were his last words.'

'Oh dear,' I sighed, as Cousin Yvonne paused. 'After all, I shall have to be sorry for the poor old thing.'

'Yes, indeed, we must all feel for her. I fully believe that all Lady Wilde's mistakes are due to over-anxiety on Thurston's account. The poor lad is paying dearly for his father's errors. She is almost afraid to trust him out of her sight. She would not hear of Eton or Harrow, and no one but Thurston himself dared to propose Oxford once, and then she refused to listen to him.'

'But, Cousin Yvonne, what will he do with his life?

Thurston told Sydney once that he wanted to go into the army or enter some profession, but that his grandmother would not hear of it. She only tells him that after her death he will be very rich, and that he will find plenty to do in managing his property. But, as Thurston says, she is so hale and hearty that she may live until she is ninety.'

'Yes, it is extremely short-sighted of her,' returned Cousin Yvonne. 'I should have thought Lady Wilde would have remembered her motto, "Satan finds some mischief still for idle hands to do."''

'Thurston is not exactly idle,' I observed, for I felt bound to defend my playmate; 'he boats and rides and shoots, and manages to enjoy life.'

'A young man will always do that,' returned Cousin Yvonne, rather gravely; 'and I do not deny that Lady Wilde provides for him very generously, and that as far as creature comforts are concerned he has everything he wants. But how long do you suppose that a fine young fellow like Thurston will be content to pass his existence at his grannie's apron-strings? By-and-by there will be friction or open mutiny, and it will be the survival of the fittest.' But I had no opportunity to answer, for Sydney came into the room, and Cousin Yvonne rather abruptly changed the subject.

I thought I had never seen Sydney look so sweet as she did that evening; it seemed to me that father's favourite word 'bonnie' just suited her. Without being exactly handsome, she was exceedingly attractive; her fresh, healthy complexion, the clear brightness of her eyes, and the engaging frankness of her expression always charmed people.

I was rather sorry that Cousin Yvonne wore her favourite grey satin that evening; it did not suit her

wan looks, and made her look dim and shadowy. She was always so beautifully dressed, but to-night she needed some relief. I remarked on this to Sydney afterwards, for no one ever ventured to criticise Cousin Yvonne's dress in her presence. 'If she had only worn black,' I said discontentedly; 'but that cold, shimmering grey dress makes her look like a French marquise in the *conciergerie* waiting to hear her name read out from the death-roll.' But Sydney did not laugh; indeed, she seemed a little shocked at the ghastly comparison.

'I was sorry too,' she said simply; 'but somehow, Githa, she cannot help looking beautiful in any gown. I am afraid she felt ill to-night, for she was so very quiet.'

St. Helen's Tower was a big white castellated house, and in my opinion it was rather too large and straggling for comfort. The person who built it evidently cared for spacious apartments. Some of the rooms were immense, and in winter it was difficult to warm the dining-room and library sufficiently for comfort; and later Lady Wilde had used the breakfast-room for meals.

There were two large drawing-rooms with folding doors, which were always thrown open when Lady Wilde had company. They were magnificently proportioned rooms, but the arrangement of the furniture never pleased me. Lady Wilde was early Victorian in her taste, and being very conservative she had not thought fit to adapt herself to modern ideas. She delighted in heavy mahogany, and crimson flock-papers which absorbed light, and big mirrors with massive gilt frames; silver tables and bric-à-brac she classified as rubbish.

When we entered the drawing-room at St. Helen's, we found Lady Wilde as usual seated in her throne-like chair beside the fire, talking to Colonel Etheridge. She was a big, heavy-looking woman, and had never been good-looking in her life, and no amount of pains on her excellent maid's part could make her look as though her clothes belonged to her. She was always handsomely dressed in either silk, satin, or velvet, and she was fond of jewellery—the massive sort which modern taste discards. She was a very plain woman, and her heavy jaws gave her a stern appearance; but when she spoke or smiled her expression was less forbidding, though her voice was naturally harsh.

She welcomed me very kindly, and then introduced Colonel Etheridge; but he told her that we had met before, though he owned that he had some difficulty in recognising me. He was a tall, grave-looking man with a bushy grey moustache, but he could make himself very pleasant.

I left him to talk to Cousin Yvonne, and crossed the room to join Rhona and Sydney, who were seated side by side on the big Chesterfield couch. They made room for me between them, and Thurston came up and chatted to us.

I thought Rhona looked rather nice that evening; she was very becomingly dressed, and she seemed less colourless than usual. She had rather pretty eyes, though they were small; her fair hair was very thick and abundant, and it was arranged with more care than usual.

Thurston told us that his grannie was fidgeting because the vicar was late, but he came in the next moment and apologised for the unavoidable delay. He had been called to baptize a dying infant, he said

rather gravely, as he gave his arm to me. I was rather surprised that I should take precedence of Rhona, who, being an heiress, was rather a person to be considered, but it was evident that Lady Wilde had her own ideas.

Thurston had taken in Cousin Yvonne, and Rhona was on his other hand, with Sydney beyond her. Lady Wilde never talked much at dinner, and Sydney would be expected to cater for Colonel Etheridge's entertainment. He was a little ponderous, and given to lay down the law in rather a sledge-hammer fashion, and Sydney flashed a naughty little look at me—as she unfolded her napkin—as though she would willingly have changed places.



CHAPTER XIII

STELLA GIVES ME A NEW NAME

Shall one like me
Judge hearts like yours?

TRENCH.

Things done well
And with a care, exempt themselves from fear.

SHAKESPEARE.

Shutting out Fear, with all the strength of Hope.

BROWNING.

I NEVER enjoyed an evening at St. Helen's Towers as I did that night.

During dinner I had a great deal of interesting conversation with Mr. Carlyon. We discussed not only the latest work of fiction, but a variety of other topics. I told him about the conversation classes, which seemed to impress him a good deal, and I also mentioned that Miss Redford and I were attending some rather advanced lectures on German literature. He seemed to have studied the subject thoroughly, and when I made a remark to this effect, he told me that he had spent eight months at Heidelberg after he had left Oxford.

He was evidently a well-read, thoughtful man, but I found no difficulty in talking to him; daily inter-

course with a clever, cultivated woman like Miss Redford had been an untold advantage to me, and for the last year or two father had conversed with me on all the subjects that interested him. He called it 'forming my mind,' but I think that he liked to feel that I was in touch with him in everything.

I do not remember how it was that I found myself discoursing on the merits and beauties of my mare Bab, it was probably because he had admired my little Yorkshire terrier Roy; he told me that he was devoted to dogs and horses, and that in his palmy days he had been very fond of riding and driving. 'But a poor vicar must cut his coat to suit his cloth,' he went on with a whimsical smile, 'so I content myself with boating.' But I took this remark with a grain of salt, for Cousin Yvonne had told me that Mr. Carlyon had private means and was not dependent on his living. 'Of course his wife brought him nothing,' she had added.

I could not help noticing how quiet Cousin Yvonne was; she was generally the leader of the conversation, but to-night she contented herself with an occasional remark to Thurston and Rhona.

Thurston was unusually sedate; he was evidently trying his best to discharge his social duties; but I could not help noticing that while he talked to Rhona his eyes often wandered to Sydney's bright face, and that every now and then he seemed as though he were listening to her animated voice. Rhona was too quiet and diffident to interest him. She was one of those shy people who only appear to advantage in their own homes. Amiable and lovable as I knew her to be, I could quite understand Thurston's indifference. His nature was somewhat melancholic, and he needed to be

roused and amused ; and, with all her gentleness, Rhona was rather prim and uninteresting.

It was towards the end of dinner that Mr. Carlyon began speaking of his children.

'Oh, by-the-bye,' he observed somewhat abruptly, 'I have never given you Stella's message. She wants you and Miss Herbert to come to nursery tea to-morrow afternoon'; but, before I could reply, Sydney, who had heard her name mentioned, leaned forward rather eagerly.

'Oh, Githa,' she said in her bright way, 'you must not think of refusing Stella's invitation ; you have no idea how delightful those nursery teas are !'

'But are you sure that Stella really wished me to come?' I returned in a hesitating voice, for I was not at all certain what Cousin Yvonne would think of such an unconventional proceeding.

'Should I give you Stella's words verbatim, Miss Darnell,' he said with a pleasant smile. "'I want Herberts and 'the big girl what learns lessons' to come to tea to-morrow with me and Cyril and Peace—will you ask them, Boy?'" I hope you will not refuse my little girl's invitation,' he continued. 'Unfortunately I have an engagement in town, so I am not likely to be on the premises.' I wonder if Mr. Carlyon said this with a purpose ; but, as I knew we had no engagement for the next day, and Sydney seemed willing, I accepted Stella's invitation without a scruple. I found out afterwards that Sydney had been there to tea two or three times, and that nursery teas at the Vicarage were quite an institution, even Rhona had been once invited.

'Of course, one never sees Mr. Carlyon,' observed Sydney ; 'even if he is in the house he would never think of intruding. I love Stella's tea-parties ; Peace

always makes one so comfortable, and the twins are such darlings.'

After dinner Sydney and I sang. There were one or two duets that we had practised together, though there had been no opportunity of trying them over, but they seemed to go very well. I loved to sing with Sydney, she had such a delightful voice, so strong and sweet, and it seemed to carry mine with it. Singing was a perfect joy to Sydney. It seemed as natural for her to sing as it was for a thrush to flute its delicious melody in the early summer.

I knew Rhona was taking violin lessons, but she could not be persuaded to play, though I believe she could have acquitted herself very creditably, but the mere idea threw her into a perfect agony of shyness.

'Oh, don't ask me! please do not let father tease me!' I heard her say to Thurston in such an imploring way; and when we had finished our duet, and I had sat down beside her, she sighed in quite a pathetic manner.

'Oh, how beautifully you both sing!' she exclaimed almost plaintively.

'Oh, there is no comparison between us,' I returned. 'Sydney sings far better than I,' which was certainly the truth, and I never cared to sing a solo after her.

'All the same, you have a pretty voice, Githa,' she sighed, 'and it was delightful to listen to you both. My violin-playing will never give such pleasure; besides, I am too nervous to play in public.'

That was the worst of Rhona, she never would make the best of herself. She had had every advantage that money could give; she had had the best masters; and had had lessons in Dresden and Florence, and I should be afraid to state the price of her violin; and

she really played with a great deal of delicacy and feeling ; and I could well understand Colonel Etheridge's disappointment when she refused to take her part in the evening's entertainment.

'It is no use,' I heard him say to Lady Wilde. 'The child inherits her nervousness from her mother'; but Lady Wilde's lip curled a little sarcastically.

Nerves were evidently not early Victorian, and she called them by another name.

'The young ladies of the present day are extremely fanciful,' she observed in a voice audible to us both ; and poor Rhona grew very pink and seemed quite distressed.

'Lady Wilde is vexed because I do not play,' she whispered, 'and father will lecture me when we get home, and then mother will be worried'; for although Rhona was an only child and her parents were devoted to her, her life was not always easy.

Colonel Etheridge was rather a martinet ; he was fussy and opinionative, and could put his foot down very heavily when anything displeased him ; and Mrs. Etheridge's ill-health made her at times rather depressing, although she was a sweet woman in her way. It was not the most healthy atmosphere for a girl of Rhona's temperament, though both Sydney and I knew how much she strove to be a comfort to her parents and to satisfy them.

Rhona would have a bad quarter of an hour ; the lecture would simply crush her and do no good. If I had had her quietly to myself I should have found plenty to say to her, but I only rehearsed my little speech for my own benefit in my bedroom.

'It is not shyness so much as self-consciousness, Rhona,' that is what I longed to say. 'You are

always thinking about yourself and your failures ; you never think about anything else. You ought to have considered your father and tried to play, even though your hands were as cold as ice and your heart was thumping. What would it matter if you had broken down. You would have made the attempt, and we should all have been pleased with you.' But there was no opportunity to deliver my bracing little speech, for Colonel Etheridge carried her off ; and then Cousin Yvonne said it was getting late, and that broke up the party.

Mr. Carlyon and Thurston put us into the carriage, and as we were about to drive off he said to me, ' Am I to tell my little Star that you and Miss Herbert will come to-morrow ? '

' Oh yes, certainly, we shall be delighted ' ; and then he smiled and said good-night.

' His little Star,' how quaint and pretty it sounded ! Cousin Yvonne responded to this thought, for she said with a little sigh, ' It is better to walk in the starlight if one cannot have the sunshine ' ; and then she added, ' Mr. Carlyon would be very lonely but for those children.'

Sydney and I spent most of the next morning practising over duets together, and Cousin Yvonne sat at her needlework and listened to us ; but more than once I saw her lay down her embroidery and gaze out of the window with a strange, abstracted look, as though she were recalling past troubles.

In the afternoon we went over to the Vicarage, and to the twins' intense delight we took Roy with us. The nursery was a pleasant room. Peace, who was arranging the tea-table, received us very kindly. The children welcomed us in a most demonstrative fashion,

and before many minutes were over we were all in a heap on the floor together, with Roy in the middle.

During tea-time the twins' behaviour was most exemplary, Peace evidently kept them in excellent order. Cyril sat beaming on us as he ate his bread-and-butter, and Stella counted the buns somewhat anxiously—'One each, and two for the big girl,' I heard her say; and once she whispered to me to take a little more 'dooseberry jam, as Peace would not mind'; but Peace, with much tact, refrained from noticing these small infractions on the nursery rules. The moment tea was over I was pushed into the big rocking-chair, and both children clambered up into my lap, with Roy on the top of them. To my dismay Stella began on the subject of 'dog-angels.'

'Where do the dog-angels go?' she observed, as she stroked Roy's silky coat.

'Dog-angels! what on earth do you mean, darling?' asked Sydney in a puzzled voice; but Stella turned pettishly from her dear 'Herberts.'

'The big girl knows,' she said loftily,—'the good little doggies wot die and are put in the ground. There must be such lots and lots of dog-angels,' she continued reflectively, as her dimpled hand rested lovingly on Roy's head. 'Suppose there is no room for them.'

'No room for the dog-angels,' echoed Cyril sadly.

Peace smiled as she carried off the tea-tray. She was evidently used to Stella's queer fancies, but I was sorely puzzled. How was I to explain to this infantine philosopher that we had no warrant for the belief in the immortality of animals. It was useless to quote the text which was so conclusive to my own mind, 'Without were dogḡs,' which had destroyed for ever my cherished hope of a reunion in a future life with Sultan

and Bab and Roy. How amused father had been with my theories on this subject.

'Well,' observed Stella, as I remained silent, 'I suppose only the grown-ups know'; which was a hit at me, and put me on my mettle at once.

'Grown-ups do not know everything, Stella dear,' I said mildly; 'and no one can tell where the good little doggies go when they die; that is why we must be so kind to them now and make them happy, because they have such a short life.'

Stella seemed struck with this remark; but Cyril had a new idea, for he suddenly took my chin in his hand to gain my attention.

'Ain't you got no name,' he asked in his soft drawl, 'no name like Herberts?'

'Of course I have,' I returned, smiling; 'my name is Githa Darnell. Don't you think it is very pretty?' But Cyril shook his head. Stella interpreted for him as usual.

'Cyril does not like queer names, and—and yours is so very queer. I think Cyril and me had better call you Girlie, it is much nicer'; and for many and many a long day I was 'Girlie' to these heavenly-minded twins.

Before we left we had a good game of hide-and-seek, and then the children took me into their bedroom to see mother.

'They always do that, dear little souls,' observed Peace, who was mending by the window, 'and they never go to bed without a kiss and good-night to the picture.'

A curious feeling came over me as I stood before the little table where Lady Doreen's picture was placed. It was a large photograph, handsomely framed, and a

small vase of flowers stood in front of it. Was it because of my own motherless condition that the tears suddenly rose to my eyes and I involuntarily pressed the little creatures closer to me? and as I did so I could almost have fancied there was a smile on the pictured face.

She must have been quite young, this poor Lady Doreen. There was something very sweet and attractive in the face, and, in spite of her motherhood, a girlish look which was very pathetic under the circumstances.

'Lady Doreen must have been much younger than her husband,' I remarked to Cousin Yvonne as I narrated this little episode.

'There is no doubt of that,' she returned, with a keen look at my flushed face. I was very emotional, and she saw at once that I had been strongly moved. 'She was only seven-and-twenty when she died. I believe she was very amiable and charming, but not at all clever. One cannot help wondering,' she continued musingly, 'whether Mr. Carlyon would not have found this out for himself if she had lived. I believe they had no tastes in common, that she never opened a book if she could help it, and that she could not talk of anything but her children and domestic matters; but, as Lady Wilde said, they always seemed very happy. I believe it was grief at her loss that made him throw up a much better living. He told his bishop he must have a change.'

I was very pleased and amused with my new name, though I was secretly a little vexed that I could not make Stella believe that I was really grown up. She was a very determined little person, and stuck to her opinions with the tenacity of a limpet. She certainly allows that I am fully grown up now, and she has

coined a new name for me, which I will not at present divulge.

I thought a good deal about Lady Doreen that night; there was something so sad and tragical in the idea that she had been taken away in the fulness of her happiness. The gentle face and beaming eyes haunted me. Was it any wonder that Mr. Carlyon had grown old and grey? And yet one could not look at him without seeing that he had fought bravely and refused to be crushed by his sorrow. Perhaps his nature was buoyant, for there were times when he seemed to throw off his sadness. When he forgot himself utterly, one felt instinctively that he was a man to whom one could tell a great trouble. I remember I said something like this to Cousin Yvonne, and she looked at me a little strangely.

'You may be right, Githa,' she said, after a moment's silence. 'I am quite sure that Mr. Carlyon is a person one could absolutely trust in an emergency. He would be kind—he is always kind; but he is inflexible too. With him right is right, and wrong wrong. He would not tolerate half measures, or turn aside if the narrow way be ever so stony'; and then Cousin Yvonne sighed again a little heavily.

Perhaps Cousin Yvonne was right. She was a shrewd student of human nature, and she generally took her neighbour's measure correctly. Mr. Carlyon might be inflexible, but I had a secret conviction that Lady Doreen would not have endorsed Cousin Yvonne's opinion.



CHAPTER XIV

BREAKERS AHEAD

Who is so wise that he can fully know all things? Be not, therefore, too confident in thine own opinion, but be willing to hear the opinion of others.—THOMAS À KEMPIS.

First weigh and consider, then dare.—ANON.

What is right to be done cannot be done too quickly.—ANON.

COUSIN YVONNE received a note from Mrs. Etheridge the next morning asking us all to have tea with her that afternoon. The Etheridges seldom invited people to dinner. Mrs. Etheridge's bad health was the reason. She was hardly ever well enough to play the part of hostess to her guests, and the fatigue of a long dinner would have tired her much. She could only see her friends in a quiet way, so there were frequent tea-parties at the Mount.

Cousin Yvonne was rather fond of Mrs. Etheridge; but on this occasion she begged to excuse herself. 'I rather increased my cold the other evening,' she observed; 'but I should like you two girls to go'; and she would not hear of one of us remaining at home, though I was anxious to stay with her. My pertinacity seemed to trouble her, for she said rather shortly that she preferred to be alone; but, as I looked a little hurt

at this rebuff, she continued more gently, 'I should be very sorry for you to refuse Mrs. Etheridge's invitation, Githa; Rhona would be so disappointed. And sometimes I feel more disposed for my own company than for other people's. If you will stay with me to-morrow evening, my dear, while Sydney goes to church, I shall be very grateful.' And, of course, I acquiesced in this arrangement, though I was rather sorry to think I should miss Mr. Carlyon's evening sermon. He kept no curate, and always preached twice on Sundays.

I had no particular desire to go to the Mount, but I saw Cousin Yvonne wished us to do so. But when I found myself alone with Sydney I grumbled a good deal. 'I can't think what has come to Cousin Yvonne,' I said discontentedly; 'she does not seem a bit like herself. We used to have such good times together; but this visit things are so different.'

'Yes, I know,' returned Sydney soothingly; 'but it is no use worrying about it. Aunt Yvonne is not well, you know, Githa. Colonel Etheridge is rather prosy and long-winded, and he would just talk her to death; he always does. He never will talk to any one else if she is in the room. He told me once that she was a grand woman, and had a man's intellect and a woman's heart.'

I smiled at this. He was not the only man who admired Cousin Yvonne, and I privately hoped that Colonel Etheridge would not think me worthy of his attentions. But, to my relief, when we arrived at the Mount we found Mrs. Etheridge and Rhona alone; and he did not make his appearance until tea was nearly over. I always pitied Mrs. Etheridge. I know she suffered a great deal at times, though she never

complained; but it was not always easy for her to maintain her cheerfulness. She was sometimes very low and despondent about herself; and Rhona was always so good and patient with her.

Mrs. Etheridge had been very pretty in her youth, and she was a very graceful woman still, and her gentleness and refinement gave a pleasing impression. She took my hand kindly, and made me sit down beside her, and talked so nicely about my father and our home life together. She had a motherly way that appealed to young people. Rhona looked far nicer than she had at St. Helen's Towers; her dark sapphire velveteen suited her so well. She looked brighter and more animated, and when her father entered the room she addressed him almost playfully. To my surprise, Thurston walked in a little late; but I found out afterwards that he had been invited, and had left the invitation open until the last moment. I thought Rhona coloured up, as though she were pleased; but Sydney, who was talking to Colonel Etheridge, never looked round until Thurston stood before her.

When tea was over Mrs. Etheridge beckoned to her daughter, and whispered a word or two in her ear. Rhona glanced at her father rather apprehensively, and then she nodded.

'I will do my best, mother.'

'Do, my darling, it will please him so much, and he has had such a worrying day'; and then Rhona went off dutifully to fetch her violin. Colonel Etheridge always accompanied his daughter. He had been a very good pianist in his youth, and music was still a passion with him.

Mrs. Etheridge lay on her couch and listened in

a sort of rapture. Colonel Etheridge might be a martinet in the household, as Cousin Yvonne said, but he was evidently a hero in his wife's eyes. The tall, spare man, with the bushy grey moustache and small keen eyes, was to her a miracle of martial prowess. She endowed him with a thousand excellences, and slurred over his faults and blemishes as only a loving woman can. From an infant Rhona had been taught that her father's word was a household law, and that she must never contradict him.

'When you are married, dearest, you will understand that husbands and fathers expect to be obeyed, and even if we cannot agree with them,' went on this pattern of a wife, 'it is better not to let them know it'; and Mrs. Etheridge carried out this wifely policy in such a masterly manner that Colonel Etheridge held up his wife to all his friends and acquaintances as the model of a woman. 'Susannah is simply perfect,' he said once to a relative. 'I tell Rhona that her mother is a saint,' and Colonel Etheridge took out his white silk handkerchief and used it lustily, while the keen irritable-looking eyes were somewhat moist.

Rhona blundered a little at first, and Colonel Etheridge glanced at her rather sharply under his heavy eyebrows; but Thurston said 'Bravo' under his breath, and Rhona smiled faintly and recovered herself, and then they played several charming pieces by Grieg. When Rhona gained confidence she really played extremely well. Her manipulation of the instrument was excellent, and her touch very light. She looked very happy when we told her so, and I was sorry that Colonel Etheridge recalled the old grievance.

'Lady Wilde would have enjoyed that last piece,'

he said meaningly. 'It is a pity that you deprived her of so much pleasure. I doubt whether she will ever ask you to play again.'

'If grannie does not, I will,' returned Thurston kindly, for, as he said to Sydney afterwards, 'he hated to see the poor little thing badgered in that unfeeling way.' Rhona looked quite pretty as she flashed a grateful look at him, and Colonel Etheridge smiled under his big moustache and patted his daughter's shoulder benignantly as he passed.

Sydney and I sang together after that, and the afternoon passed so quickly and pleasantly that I was quite surprised when Sydney told me that it was nearly seven and that we must go at once. Thurston evidently wished to accompany us, but Colonel Etheridge detained him, and we were half-way on our homeward road before he overtook us, quite breathless with haste.

'The old fellow would keep me,' he said impatiently. 'I had to tell him that I should be late for dinner, or I should never have got away at all.'

'I thought Lady Wilde never dined until half-past seven,' observed Sydney coolly.

'Oh, of course it was a bit of a fib,' returned Thurston with a vexed laugh; 'but I have been counting on the walk home all the afternoon.'

He looked at Sydney as he spoke. The path was rather narrow, and I dropped behind for a moment, but neither of them seemed to notice it. He went on talking in a low, eager tone, but I could not catch his words.

A sudden thought flashed into my mind: was it possible that Thurston really cared seriously for Sydney? He was only one-and-twenty, and it might

possibly be lad's love or a passing fancy, and yet I had a strong conviction that he was in earnest.

Sydney, too, was different. She seemed a little shy with him this evening, and less unrestrained and spontaneous in her talk. I longed to ask Cousin Yvonne if she had noticed anything. Thurston was a great favourite of hers, and I had a notion that nothing would please her more. Sydney was her adopted daughter, and I knew how dear she was to her.

I found an unexpected opportunity that very evening, for after dinner Sydney was called away for an hour. She was giving lessons in arithmetic to a backward youth of seventeen who was anxious to fit himself for a shopman's situation, and he came to her two evenings in the week. Sydney was a very good teacher. She had a clear head, and knew how to explain things in a simple, lucid way.

Cousin Yvonne was knitting a silk tie for Thurston. She always gave him some little present on his birthday and at Christmas; but she told me that this was what she called a 'tweenie gift,' and was for no special occasion. 'I shall tell him it is for a good boy,' she observed composedly.

This gave me an opening. 'Cousin Yvonne,' I said suddenly, 'such an odd idea came into my head as I was walking home with Thurston and Sydney this evening.' She looked up a little sharply at this, and I went on.

'Do you think—has it ever crossed your mind that Thurston may care for Sydney? Of course, I do not know. I have nothing very definite to go on, but it struck me this evening that he admires her.'

I thought Cousin Yvonne seemed a little disturbed.

'I hope you are wrong in your surmise, Githa,' she

said very seriously. 'Thurston is far too young for anything but a passing fancy. Young men of his age fall in love over and over again. Thurston sees so few girls, and he and Sydney have been thrown so much together, it is just propinquity. They have always been good friends, and I daresay that in a way he admires her.'

Cousin Yvonne was trying to explain things away, but I could read her thoughts. She was evidently uneasy; probably the same idea had crossed her mind, but she had refused to entertain it. She observed things so keenly, that I felt convinced that she must have noticed how Thurston's attention had wandered during dinner and how he had watched Sydney.

'Sydney's manner was quite different to him this afternoon,' I went on. 'She seemed as though she wished to keep him at a distance. If he is beginning to care for her ——' But Cousin Yvonne interrupted me.

'I trust it is only your fancy, Githa, my dear; you are making me very uncomfortable. I will not deny that Thurston's manner rather troubled me last evening, but I trusted that no one else noticed it.'

'But, Cousin Yvonne,' I exclaimed, 'I thought that you were so fond of Thurston, and that nothing would have pleased you better than to know that he cared for Sydney.'

'Nothing would please me less, you mean,' she returned in her decided way. 'Of course, I am fond of the lad, I have known him from a baby. But what has my affection to do with the matter? If the foolish boy is losing his heart to Sydney, he is just sowing trouble for himself and every one else.'

'What can you mean?' I faltered. 'Thurston is very young, of course—but if they care for each other!'

'Sydney must not care for him,' she returned, with a worried look. Something must be done; Thurston ought to be warned. His grandmother would never permit him to marry a penniless girl. It is not as though Sydney were my daughter; I can only provide for her moderately after my death. Besides,' with an impatient frown, 'Lady Wilde has far different views for her grandson. She means him to marry Rhona.'

'But this is preposterous, Cousin Yvonne. We are no longer in the dark ages. Thurston will insist on choosing his own wife.'

'You will not get Lady Wilde to believe that, Githa. She and Colonel Etheridge are bent on his marrying Rhona, and if it were not for Sydney he really could not do better for himself. She is a sweet, good girl, and will make an excellent wife. The fact is, though you do not know it, Githa, and I do not rightly understand it myself,—Lady Wilde and Colonel Etheridge have interest in some big business concern; without being partners, their interest is identical, and they are anxious that it should be kept in the family. My explanation is a little obscure, but I cannot make it plainer. From children they have been intended for each other. If Thurston marries Rhona he will be a wealthy man.'

'But if he is in love with Sydney, Cousin Yvonne?'

'My dear, the thing is impossible. I shall have to send Sydney away. Thurston could never marry her. He is dependent on his grandmother, and if he crosses her will, she can cut him off with the proverbial shilling. He has no profession, and has had no training for business. Circumstances will be too strong for him; he will be driven to marry Rhona.'

'But he does not love her,' I returned indignantly,

'even if Sydney were out of the question. Thurston ought not to marry Rhona; he does not care for her; he thinks her colourless and insignificant and uninteresting. How could he pass his life with her? It would be wrong and wicked if he married her.'

'I am afraid many people do these wrong and wicked things,' sighed Cousin Yvonne. 'A girl will occasionally sell her fair self for a coronet, and mercenary marriages are made every day. But you are right, my dear, and it is a bitter and crying shame. But the question is, what are we to do for these poor children? for they are little more than children. Thurston is so young that he may get over his fancy if only Sydney could be sent away, but the question is, where?'

'Let her come to us,' I returned eagerly. 'Father likes her so much, and I should love to have her. She could come for a visit and stay as long as you wish.'

I thought Cousin Yvonne seemed pleased with this idea; she even owned that it would be a good plan. And then she said that she must think over it very carefully. 'I cannot give my mind to it just now,' she went on hurriedly. 'I have other business on hand that needs my immediate attention, and there is no use doing things in a hurry, we must be careful to make no mistakes. You have done well to give me this hint, Githa, and I shall watch over the dear child more carefully. Heaven forbid that any such unhappiness should come to her—or to that poor boy. He is not in my hands,' she broke off with a deep sigh, as though the whole subject wearied her inexpressibly; and she seemed so worn and tired that Sydney looked at her quite anxiously when she returned to the

room, but Cousin Yvonne only said her head ached and she thought she would go to bed, but I could see Sydney was not quite satisfied.

'I wonder what you and Aunt Yvonne have been talking about,' she observed when we were alone, 'your face is so hot, Githa'; but I only answered in a frivolous manner, and hurried off, for fear she should ask any more questions.

It was a relief to shut myself in my own room. It was a lovely spring night, and the moonlight was flooding the little lawn and paths. I sat down by the window and thought over my conversation with Cousin Yvonne. I had only given pain where I had expected to give pleasure. But I had never guessed at all this complication and difficulty, and my heart was sore for my old playmate.

Of course, I was only a romantic child, but it seemed to me such a beautiful idea that he and Sydney should learn to care for each other; the whole thing was so idyllic and simple, a sort of lovely poem in real life; and I knew, though Cousin Yvonne would not confess it, that nothing would have pleased her so well.

And now there was Rhona—innocent, unconscious Rhona—a mere tool in her father's hands, a shadowy, pathetic little figure hovering in the background.

'And we are not in the dark ages,' I repeated again, folding my arms comfortably under my head as I gazed out on the moonlight; and then my thoughts made a sudden divagation: 'What was that important business on hand that needed Cousin Yvonne's immediate attention?' But how little I guessed how soon I should be able to answer that question!

CHAPTER XV

WHILE RINGING TO EVENSONG

Nothing is too little to be ordered by our Father ; nothing too little in which to see His hand ; nothing which touches our souls too little to accept from Him ; nothing too little to be done for Him.—ANON.

'Tis the life, rather than the lips, which speak,
And a man's greatest utterance is himself.

ANON.

FROM a child I had always loved Sunday at Bayfield ! I loved the quiet little services, although they were somewhat unadorned and simple in Mr. Dennison's time, and to walk through the churchyard with its rose-bordered paths and flower-decked graves.

It was pleasant to see the white flocks of geese straggling over the village green in the sunshine, and now and then hissing their alarmed protests as the school lads elbowed each other noisily off the path ; and I liked to watch Gaffer Stokes hobbling down the road in his grey smock and smart red handkerchief, with his wife beside him.

The old couple were survivals of the Georgian period, and Bayfield was absurdly proud of them. Grannie Stokes, as she was called, was still hale and hearty in spite of her eighty and odd years. She was a comely old woman, with cheeks like withered apples,

and eyes that were blue and clear as an infant's; and she always carried her prayer-book wrapped up in a blue checked handkerchief, with a sprig of rosemary, or wall-flower, or fresh lavender tucked in the folds. They were a dear old couple, and lived in a quaint little cottage opposite the church, called the Beehive, a perfect picture of a place, with a red-tiled kitchen and a roomy porch, where Gaffer Stokes smoked his pipe in the evening. The cottage belonged to Cousin Yvonne, and I knew the old couple lived in it rent-free, and that she gave them a small weekly allowance besides.

They had a large family, but all their sons and daughters were married and had children of their own; but they were honest, hard-working folk, and each one subscribed a small sum towards their parents' maintenance, and on washing or ironing days either Betty or Susan or Lizzie would step over to the Beehive to do an hour's turn at the wash-tub to save grannie.

'I have my fill of blessings,' grannie would say: 'we have good children, plenty to eat, and a roof to cover us in our old age. And I thank the Lord humbly for His mercies,' she finished, looking proudly round her comfortable kitchen, the house place all redded up, and always a bright little fire in the well-polished grate.

Grannie had always something pleasant to relate of her children's kindness and thoughtfulness. Now it was John,—John, a grey-headed man, his shoulders already bowed with work,—who had brought them a rabbit and a fine lot of potatoes; or Ben, who had divided the loin of pork that his master had given him, and had carried them a goodly portion, though it was none too large for his family of hungry boys and girls.

'Grannie is fond of a bit of pork and apple sauce,'

he said somewhat gruffly when his wife ventured to remonstrate—not that Nancy would not do a good turn for her mother-in-law, though she would have drawn the line at roast pork.

Cousin Yvonne was very fond of the old couple, and she was always planning something fresh for their comfort; but then she was good to all the village folk.

I woke that Sunday with a curious feeling that either something had happened or would happen; and then I remembered my talk with Cousin Yvonne. I wished that I had held my tongue and not given her this fresh cause for worry. When I saw her pale face at the breakfast-table, I was quite sure that she had not slept well; but she greeted me with more than her usual kindness.

'I suppose you will go to the Sunday school with Sydney,' she observed; 'so we shall meet in church.' And as I knew Sydney wished to introduce her little scholars to me, I assented to this arrangement, though I thought Cousin Yvonne would be wiser to stay at home. I was beginning to feel seriously uneasy about her. I was convinced that she was either ill or unhappy. Her face looked quite drawn and old that morning; but, as Sydney said, she could not help being beautiful, and even in old age she would look better than other people.

It was a lovely morning, and the promise of May was in the air. I noticed the pink and white hawthorn in the Vicarage garden, and the great downy greenish-white balls of the guelder roses hanging heavily on the walls.

As we passed through the outer room devoted to the infants, I was surprised to see Stella and Cyril

sitting very erect and open-eyed at the end of the form. I nudged Sydney to make her look, but she said coolly that they always attended the morning class and generally behaved very well. But I thought little Miss Williams, the draper's pretty daughter, seemed a little overwhelmed by her responsibilities. I found out afterwards that Stella had made some very surprising statements during the morning's lessons, which were as uncalled for and irrelevant as Mr. F's Aunt's in *Little Dorrit*.

'Would you believe it, Miss Darnell,' observed the poor little teacher piteously, 'the smallest children were saying their "Gentle Jesus" so nicely, and dear little Cyril repeated it with them, and Stella suddenly got very red, and put up her hand and wanted to say something to teacher. And what do you think it was, Miss Herbert? It was only "she thoughted that 'ell must be rather a nice warm place when it was cold, and that she and Cyril did so want to play with fire" —did you ever hear such a thing? But I am thankful to say that most of the children were too young to understand.'

'You ought to have given her a bad mark, Miss Williams.'

Miss Williams sighed. 'So I did, Miss Darnell; but she was in a perverse mood, and said she liked bad marks. And then Cyril said he wanted one too, and all the children laughed. I really felt ready to cry; but Mr. Carlyon happened to pass through the room, and he seemed to understand without my telling him. "I am sorry you have a bad mark, Stella," he said in such a loud voice, "for I cannot possibly have tea in the nursery this evening; so I am punished as well as you." Oh, I was so sorry for the poor little

thing when he said that, though she had been naughty, for she cried and sobbed her little heart out.'

Mr. Carlyon came up to speak to us before he went into church. He wanted me to take a class that afternoon, as one of the teachers was absent.

Cousin Yvonne was in her seat when we entered; I always sat next to her. I noticed a great change in the service; the choir was better trained, and the singing was more reverent. Mr. Carlyon read the Lesson and intoned the Litany most beautifully, and his sermon was very helpful. He had chosen such a singular text, 'And fears shall be in the way.' It seemed addressed to people advanced in years more than to the young; and he used an odd simile, for he spoke more than once of 'the magnifying-glass of fear.'

'It has been wisely said,' he went on, 'that we project our own shadows; and it is certain that even good and religious-minded people give themselves and others a great deal of unnecessary pain by forecasting the evil that may not come. They can trust their heavenly Father to bring them to heaven, but they cannot leave to-morrow to His loving care. "Fears shall be in the way," like the lions that lay in wait to frighten Christian when he went up to the palace Beautiful. "O ye of little faith,"—can we not hear those words from the Master's lips spoken to timid disciples, and most surely addressed to us! The other day,' he went on in a simple, impressive way, 'in turning over an old book, I came upon a quaint verse which you may never have heard:

'Build a little fence of trust
Around to-day;
Fill the space with loving work,
And therein stay.

Look not through the sheltering bars
Upon to-morrow ;
God will help thee bear what comes
Of joy or sorrow.'

And just at the close of his sermon he quoted a sentence from the old Scotch divine, Samuel Rutherford, in a singularly solemn voice : "I wonder many times that ever a child of God should have a sad heart, considering what the Lord is preparing for him."

I looked at Cousin Yvonne as we rose at the *Gloria*, but her face had the same strained, weary look it had worn at breakfast ; her beautiful eyes were full of unspeakable sadness as they met mine ; but as we passed out of the church porch she left my side to speak to Lady Wilde, who was following us. I noticed how quickly Thurston seized his opportunity to speak to Sydney, and the tell-tale flush that rose to her face at his greeting ; I felt that my intuition had been correct. Unconsciously those two young hearts had been drawing closer to each other ; perhaps even now it might be too late for any warning word to avert the danger. If Sydney had not suddenly looked down in her shy consciousness, she must surely have seen the lovelight in Thurston's eyes.

At luncheon Sydney repeated Stella's extraordinary remark. 'I cannot imagine,' she continued in a shocked voice, 'how a baby like Stella could ever have heard of the existence of such a place. I am quite sure Peace would not have mentioned it.'

'No, indeed,' replied Cousin Yvonne ; 'but I think it is easy to find a solution of that mystery. Do you remember, Sydney, when Peace had quinsy, and was obliged to go home for a fortnight, and Lady Wilde

recommended a protégé of hers, Eliza Brett, as a temporary nursemaid? I never liked the girl, in spite of all Lady Wilde's recommendations; there is something not quite straightforward about her, and she is too plausible for my taste. I recollect I told Mr. Carlyon so, but he evidently did not share my opinion.'

'But he sent her off in a hurry, Aunt Yvonne.'

'Yes, my dear; and it was one of Stella's speeches that opened his eyes. She asked him one day why God shut up naughty people in a nasty hot place where they could not get out; she did not think it kind, if they were sorry and promised to be good. And when he asked her who had told her such a thing, she said Eliza had done so; and Cyril cried and seemed frightened. I never saw Mr. Carlyon so angry. Eliza was sent off that very day.'

'To think that these mediæval misinterpretations and hideous travesties should reach my child's ears!' he said to me. 'Material pitchforks and flames; and we believe in the Fatherhood of God! Will not utter banishment from the presence of the Beloved be punishment enough? and absence from the Light—the outer darkness—of which we are warned?'

'I fancy that Mr. Carlyon holds very strong views on this subject.'

Just before Sydney and I started for the Sunday school Rhona came in. She said her mother had had a great deal of pain that day, and seemed unusually nervous and depressed; and her father thought that a little sacred music would soothe her and make her sleep.

'Father wants Sydney and Githa to have supper with us; and he promises that he will see them

home ;' but before either could answer Cousin Yvonne interposed.

'Githa has promised to stay with me ; she is not even going to church ; but Sydney can go. There is no reason why you should not, dear.'

'If you are sure that neither you nor Githa mind,' returned Sydney. I saw from her manner that she wished to accept the invitation, though she was too unselfish to say so. Had she any hope that Thurston would be there ? I felt there would be no doubt on that point ; he generally attended evening service, and he would soon find out that Sydney was going home with Rhona, and as he had a standing invitation to the Mount he would speedily follow them. Lady Wilde would be the first to encourage him to do so, she was far too dense and unobservant to find out that Sydney, not Rhona, was the attraction.

Sydney looked very happy when this point was settled, but she said little as we walked through the village.

I found my class all ready for me, and as the little girls were very attentive and willing to be taught I spent a very pleasant and profitable afternoon. On our way home Mr. Carlyon overtook us ; he was going to a cottage a little beyond our lane, to see a sick man. Just before we parted I asked him if he had relented about the nursery tea, but he shook his head.

'I never think it wise to change my mind,' he returned ; 'baby as she is, my little Star needs a firm, guiding hand, and I love my children far too well to indulge them when they are really naughty. I dare say Peace will contrive some little amelioration in the shape of honey or jam.' It was pleasant to see Mr. Carlyon's look as he said this ; doubtless he himself had

suggested honey to Peace. I was glad to know that he could be so wise and firm with those wayward little creatures. But what a darling Stella was after all!

It had always been Cousin Yvonne's habit to play on the organ until church time, and again after supper; but this evening she went to her room, and never came down until Sydney was just starting for church. I walked a little way down the lane with her; it was a lovely evening; the thrushes and blackbirds were singing their vesper hymn, and the church bells sounded in the distance. How peaceful it was; the soft blue evening sky was flecked with tiny clouds like baby fingers; the air was sweet with the perfume of lilac and wallflowers. I felt a strange desire to be in the little church; they were to sing Bishop Ken's evening hymn, it was father's favourite. I thought of dear father when Sydney had left me, and wondered if he were missing me. 'Perhaps he has gone to Aunt Cosie,' I said to myself as I turned in at the gate.

When I re-entered the cottage I found Cousin Yvonne walking rather restlessly up and down the drawing-room; but she stopped abruptly when she saw me, and sat down by the window, and, as I did not at once follow her, she called to me.

'Will you come and sit down, Githa, I want to have a long talk with you this evening, that is why I asked you to stay with me'; she paused as though to clear her voice. 'There is something that your father wishes me to tell you, and I have only waited until you were old enough; it is about your mother.'

My mother! If a comet had suddenly flashed across the clear spring sky I could not have been more astonished; never in all these seventeen years had any one voluntarily mentioned her name. Something in

Cousin Yvonne's manner vaguely alarmed me. 'What do you mean?' I gasped. 'You knew her, you knew my mother, and yet all these years you have never spoken to me about her!'

'Of course that seems strange to you,' she answered slowly. 'I can put myself in your place and understand how you feel about it, but you cannot judge, Githa; there were reasons, and I did it for the best.'

'Did you know her well, Cousin Yvonne? I asked eagerly; and again she paused as though speech were difficult.

'She was a close friend,' she returned after a moment's silence. 'I knew all her virtues and faults, and the mistakes for which she paid so dearly.'

'And you liked her?' I persisted, for she seemed so unwilling to speak.

'Liked her—yes, I suppose so—but we were too much alike. Oh,' in a voice of despair, 'it is impossible! I never imagined the difficulty, Githa,' with curious abruptness. 'I believe you have never seen your mother's portrait. Would you like to see it? shall I show it to you?'

Wish to see it! The tears rose to my eyes with a sudden passion of longing. I think Cousin Yvonne saw that I was too much moved to answer her; for her hand rested on my shoulder for a moment with a caressing pressure, then she left the room. I sat alone in the evening light, and looked out on the pink flush in the western sky that heralded the sunset; my heart was beating faster than usual. I felt strongly agitated; Cousin Yvonne's paleness, her constrained manner, filled me with uneasy anticipations, and yet—but before I could formulate the thought that was troubling me she re-entered with two pictures, one framed, and the other

evidently a large photograph ; both were loosely wrapped in tissue paper.'

'There are two,' she observed, as she placed them on the table before me ; 'you had better look first at the latest portrait that was taken of your mother, the earlier one is underneath'; then she turned her back and walked slowly to the window.

My hands trembled as I drew off the cover. As I did so I gave a sudden start, for the pictured face that lay before me on the table was that of Cousin Yvonne.

CHAPTER XVI

'WHY DID YOU LEAVE US?'

Thou art not made like us.
We should be wroth in such a case ; but Thou forgivest.
BROWNING.

I bow before the noble mind
That freely some great wrong forgives ;
Yet nobler is the one forgiven
Who bears that burden well and lives.
A. PROCTER.

Needing so much forgiveness, God grant me at least to forgive.
LYTTON.

THERE are moments in life which seem to be stamped and branded on our memories as though seared by a hot iron. I verily believe that to my dying day I shall never forget that minute when I looked at my mother's picture.

I was not a weak, neurotic girl. On the contrary, I was physically strong and healthy ; and though my temperament was naturally impressionable and impulsive, I was by no means hysterical or highly strung. Nevertheless, the shock of that overpowering surprise turned me so faint and sick that I was unable to speak or move—no exclamation crossed my lips, there were only flashes before my eyes and a choking sensation in my throat. I felt as helpless as a child who was lost,

and found itself in a strange, lonely place, with night coming on.

'Githa, will you not speak to me?' Surely Cousin Yvonne's voice came from a great distance, it was so low and muffled. 'Oh, my darling, do not look at me like that, or you will break my heart.' Cold hands were holding mine, and as I sank into a chair, unable to support myself a moment longer, she knelt beside me; there was a mist before my eyes, and I could not see her face plainly; but the muffled voice was close to my ears.

'I have been too sudden, but the task was beyond my strength. No—do not try to speak, my precious one, you are giddy with the shock.' She drew my head gently to her shoulder, but I could feel how her arms trembled as though she were suddenly weak. 'Rest quietly a moment, your mother is holding you.' Ah! the new tenderness in the voice. The word roused me and gave me strength to speak.

'My mother is dead.'

'No, darling, no! no one has ever told you such a lie. She is here beside you, and loving you with all her heart. Now, my sweet, I want you to listen to me. You are not fit to talk; you must lie down on that couch until the faintness has passed, and I will bring you some water. Rebecca is at church, and I do not want to call any of the servants. If I help you, you would be able to walk those few steps.' She passed her arm round me as she spoke, and I submitted to be half guided and half carried across the room. It was a relief to lie still and close my eyes until my brain ceased to whirl. It was not water, after all, she gave me, but I took it readily enough; and then she sat down beside me, not touching me, but waiting

until the quiet and silence and the cool evening air blowing on me should give me back strength.

By-and-by she closed the window and sat down again, and I opened my eyes and looked at her. I felt I could speak more calmly now. How pale she was as she smiled at me!

‘You are better now, darling?’

‘Yes, I am better. I did not mean to trouble you so, but—but—I cannot believe it.’

‘You will believe it presently,’ she said quietly. ‘There is something else I should like to show you before we talk, it may make things more real to you’; and then she went to an escritoire and took out a book and a small leather case and placed them in my lap.

I took up the book first. It was a Bible, bound beautifully and curiously in white vellum, with an antique clasp. I turned to the title-page, and recognised my father’s handwriting: ‘To my wife, Yvonne Darnell, on our wedding day, from her loving husband, Philip Egerton Darnell.’ The date was just eighteen years before.

I closed the volume and opened the case. It contained a bracelet, a band of solid gold, with a monogram in diamonds, the initials Y. L. D. evidently standing for Yvonne Lesbia Darnell. But it was not this which attracted my eyes; it was a slip of paper with my father’s handwriting on it: ‘To my darling wife, on the birth of our child, Githa, from her devoted husband,’ and there was the date of my birthday seventeen years ago.

She—my mother I suppose I must call her—saw that I understood. Then she carried them away and carefully locked them up; then in the same still way,

as if she were performing some mechanical but necessary task, she placed the framed picture before me.

'It was taken just after my marriage,' she said simply.

I gazed at it as though I were in a dream. Could that beautiful beaming face, so radiant with happiness, be the image of my mother in her girlhood—the graceful figure in the bridal dress, the dark hair with orange blossom crowning it like a diadem, the sweet, womanly expression! Involuntarily I turned to the sad-eyed woman beside me, with her grey hair. The face was still beautiful, though there were lines of suffering and self-repression legibly traced upon it. Something seemed to stir in my breast like a live thing as I looked. Was it a sort of remorseful tenderness?

'Do you believe it now, Githa?'

'Yes, I suppose so'; but my voice seemed strange and a little cold. 'You have never told me anything that is not absolutely true, and if you say that you are my mother——'

'Most assuredly I am your mother, and you are my dear and only child, my little Githa, whom I carried in my arms as an infant and who slept in my bosom.' Her eyes were soft with maternal feeling, but at that moment I could not respond.

'Why did you leave us?' I asked. Perhaps I asked the question too abruptly, for I saw her wince as though she had received a blow. She was white as death now.

'Forgive me,' I whispered, 'but surely I must know everything, or how can I understand? Mothers do not leave their children without a cause; and then there is father. If you loved us, why did you go away and leave us?' For until this question was answered, there could be no peace for me.

'Githa!' she said solemnly and tenderly, 'do not be too hard on your poor mother, even if you misjudge me, as I fear you must. Believe this one thing—I loved your father dearly, and'—here a spasm of suffering crossed her face—'and I love him still, and you are my own dear child.'

'And yet you left us!' and again she shrank at my reproachful tone.

† 'Githa, you are simply torturing me. What am I to say to you? You are too young to understand yet how a woman of my temperament can suffer. A few years after we were married my happiness was wrecked. Your father did me a great wrong—no, do not be afraid, Githa, I would rather die than tell my child that story; but—and herein lies the tragedy—I could not forgive, and my happy trust was gone, and so I told him that we must live apart.'

'And you left me to him?' Then the tears welled slowly to her eyes.

'It nearly killed me to do it—you were such a darling, Githa, and I was so proud of you, and so was he. I had meant to take you, and he had offered no objection. He said the wrong lay at his door, and he would take his punishment like a man—he was always so generous. It was easy for him to condone even a crime; but my nature is harder, I cannot easily forgive. When I told him I never wished to see his face again, I fully meant what I said.'

I felt sure she had forgotten to whom she was speaking; that recollection of the past trouble was so vivid and acute that it had for a moment thrown her off her balance, or she would not have revealed so much. What wrong could father have done her that she should desire never to see his face? The sick feeling

came rushing over me again, and I shielded my face with my hands. Whatever it was, I should never know—I would suffer no one to tell me. I registered that vow in my heart. She went on speaking, and there was a passionate insistence in her voice.

'I thank Heaven, Githa, that you have your father's temperament, not mine. If I had been differently constituted, more like other women, and the grace of forgiveness had been mine, the crooked might have been made straight, and the gaping wounds might have healed in time; but I could not fight against my nature, and peace was impossible, so I fled.'

'And you left me behind.' It was strange how I harped on this one string. It seems to me now that I was almost merciless in my pain, but she was very patient with me.

'Let me try and tell you how it happened,' she said slowly. 'I meant to take you; I had insisted on my maternal rights, and I fully intended to have my way. My will was strong even then, Githa. The evening before I left home I went up into the nursery to give some order for the morrow, but the nurse had gone down to her supper. The fire had burnt low, and the room was almost dark; but I could discern a kneeling figure by your cot, and as I paused on the threshold I heard a man's bitter sobs. Thank God that you never heard them!

'It was Philip—it was your father—and as I was about to steal away, unwilling to intrude on his grief, I heard him say, "My punishment is too great for me to bear! I have lost my wife's love, and now I must lose my little child!"

'His voice had awakened you—you were always a light sleeper,—and as a sudden flame shot up I saw

you stretch out your little arms and clasp his neck—"Don't kye, Da, baby loves 'oo." Ah, even then you loved him best, Githa. You would leave my arms gladly to spring into his, and he just worshipped you.

'That night I made up my mind that I would not inflict this suffering on him—that the sacrifice should be mine. I think death would have been easier to me. The next morning I noticed a grey streak in my hair. I came down here and left you behind me, and I wrote a letter to your father with my conditions. They were these:—I wished your young life to be untroubled and happy; and until you attained womanhood—and I fixed your present age—it was my one prayer and desire that you should not know that I was your mother. I was to be Cousin Yvonne and nothing else. The rest of my stipulations you can guess. I was to be kept informed of all that concerned you, and you were to come to me twice a year. If these conditions were faithfully fulfilled, I promised that you should remain with him. But how I have watched over you from a distance; how I have prayed for you as I could never pray for myself; how loyally your father has carried out my wishes in spite of his strong disapproval—all this it is needless to say. My object has been attained; your childhood and youth have been unshadowed; you and your father have been perfectly happy in each other's society.'

'Oh no, he is not as happy as you think,' I exclaimed. 'If you knew how sad he looks sometimes——' but she put up her hand to stop me.

'Hush! not a word of that; I cannot bear it. And now, can you judge me more mercifully, Githa?'

I stretched out my hands to her with the one word she so craved to hear—'Mother.' She had made this

heroic sacrifice for my father's sake. She who was sinned against had gone away with empty hands and a breaking heart, and yet, though it was not for her child to judge her, there was a flaw in her nobility—the grace of forgiveness was lacking.

'Mother, I did not know, but I always loved you.' Then, as she stooped over me, I laid my face against her arm, and for a little time we were silent. How quiet it was in that spring twilight, and how strangely weak I felt. It would take time to recover from such a shock. But how good she was to me. She brought me food and coaxed me to eat; but I knew she touched nothing herself; then she persuaded me to go to bed, and helped me in her quiet, efficient way. I was still a little giddy, and I think she knew it, for she would not leave me until my head was on the pillow. I heard Sydney come in; but she had evidently been told not to come near me, for she went to her own room. I could hear her walking on tiptoe past my door. But I could not rest, and sleep was far from my eyes. There was something I wanted to say to my mother, and I felt certain that she was only waiting for the household to be in their rooms before she came to me again; and I was right.

The grandfather's clock in the hall had just chimed half-past ten when she came, carrying a shaded lamp in her hand. She sat down beside me and looked at me anxiously.

'I was afraid you were not sleeping, dearest. Is there anything specially troubling you—something that you want to ask me?'

Then I clutched at her hand a little peevishly. 'Yes,' I said, 'I cannot rest; I shall never rest until I have seen father. Mother, you will not think me

unkind, but I must go to him ; I must speak to him, and hear him speak to me.'

Perhaps she saw that I was a little excited, for she seemed bent on soothing me.

'Do not be afraid, my child, I will not keep you if you desire to leave me. When do you wish to go?'

'Will you let me go home to-morrow?' And as she drew back with a hurt, pained look, I laid my cheek against her hand. 'Mother, you are so good and kind that I am sure you will understand. I cannot bear it somehow until I have seen him. I will come back ; indeed, I will come back'; and my voice rose in passionate entreaty.

'When will you come back, Githa?'

'Oh, I cannot tell you that to-night ; but if he will, it shall be in a few days. Mother, you will not be hard with me? You know I would not grieve you for worlds.'

'I know it well, darling, and I trust you fully. Yes, you shall go to-morrow, and Rebecca shall travel with you and put you into a cab ; there is no need for her to go the house.'

'Oh no ! there is no need for that.'

'Then we will consider it settled, and there shall be no more talk. You will leave your things here, and you will come back to me as soon as you can.' There was a beseeching, wistful look in the beautiful eyes which touched me inexpressibly. Then she kissed me tenderly.

'Now you must sleep like a good child, to get strength for your journey'; and she would have left me, but I held her fast, and though I said nothing, I think she knew how my heart thanked and blessed her for this concession to my wishes.

CHAPTER XVII

THE ANGEL OF FORGIVENESS

For all the souls on earth that live
To be forgiven must forgive.
Forgive him seventy times and seven !
For all the blessèd souls in Heaven
Are both Forgivers and Forgiven.

TENNYSON.

'Tis but brother's speech we need,
Speech where an accent's change gives each
The other's soul.

BROWNING.

MY mother's promise that I should go home the following day had somewhat soothed and quieted me ; but still sleep was far from my eyes, and for hours I lay open-eyed in the darkness, thinking of this strange thing that had come to my knowledge. For it seemed to me as though my little world were in chaos. Old landmarks were moved. There were curious upheavals and mysterious workings of unseen forces. Old faces looked at me with new meaning in their eyes. My mother's grave was a figment of my own imagination. The woman who had given me birth had held me this very night in her warm, living arms, and had caressed me with maternal

tenderness, and yet, in spite of my gratitude, I had remained cold and stunned.

Much as I loved her, and until this evening I never guessed how dear she was to me, my thoughts had turned from her to my father with a passion of longing and pity that almost broke my heart. For the veil had been torn down from my eyes. He had done some wrong, this beloved father, some grievous wrong, which had driven her away from her home a lonely, embittered woman, and spoiled her life. He had sinned, and she had not forgiven; and yet for his dear sake she had made the noblest sacrifice that a woman could make—she had left him her child.

Alas! alas! my idolised father was no longer the stainless, faultless being that I had imagined him to be. The shadow of wrong-doing had dimmed the brightness of the image. He was not perfect, but he was my father, and I could only love him. Was it for his only child to cast a stone at him?

My breast heaved with sobs and the tears fell fast, as I held out my arms in the darkness. The dumb cry and longing for him was so great that I felt he must know it. My one thought was to go and comfort him, to tell him that this thing should never come between us. Again and again I rehearsed over to myself the speech I would make to him. Poor, foolish child! as though my stammering tongue would have uttered the words. 'Father, it is past and gone, let us bury it as we bury some dead thing. Do not even speak to me about it. I know nothing. I will know nothing. I love you both, and I will only remember that I am your child and you are my father.' No, no. Was it likely that such a speech would ever get spoken?

But in the darkness I registered a second time that

filial vow, that no power on earth should compel me to know the sad secret that had divided two loving hearts. My father should never be shamed in his child's eyes. The sacred silence of death should invest it. It should be like a grave dug deeply and hidden away in a secret place.

'What is it to me,' I cried inwardly, 'if you have done wrong, my darling; you have repented and suffered, and I know God has forgiven you, and one day perhaps my mother will forgive you too, for she loves you still.'

At that moment there was a faint twittering of birds under my eaves, as though some wandering night thing had disturbed the tranquillity of the nest, and as I listened, and thought of the All Father's care without which 'not even a sparrow falls to the ground,' a sudden idea came to me, as though some pitying angel had whispered it in my ear. 'What if it should be my mission, my most sweet mission, to unite those two suffering hearts!' and words of prayer rose to my lips, that He who loved His earthly mother would vouchsafe me this great blessing.

The thought seemed to comfort me, and I lay and pondered over it, and hugged it closely to me, as though it were some priceless thing, and yet I felt instinctively that the task would not be easy, and the difficulty would be chiefly with my mother.

With all her generosity and strong affection her nature resented bitterly any great injury. It was not easy for her to forgive. I know how she mourned over this failing; how this hardness had grown with the unhappy years and taken strong root. What was it she had said to me this evening?— 'If I had been differently constituted, more like

other women, and the grace of forgiveness had been mine, the crooked might have been made straight, and the gaping wound healed in time, but I could not fight against my nature.' My poor mother, I felt this was true ; but I had my father's temperament, and it seemed to me a most sad and pitiful thing that so noble a nature should be lacking in this one virtue.

'To err is human, to forgive divine,' I murmured somewhat drowsily, and ~~and~~ ~~and~~ ~~the~~ ~~little~~ ~~hearts~~ ~~that~~ ~~know~~ ~~not~~ ~~how~~ ~~to~~ ~~forgive~~, ~~but~~ ~~my~~ ~~mother~~ ~~was~~ ~~a~~ ~~long~~ ~~hearted~~ ~~woman~~.

I was spent with weary thoughts and long wakefulness, but as the dim grey of the glimmering dawn stole into the room I fell into a restless sleep, and a strange, half-waking dream came to me. I thought I was in a green, misty place, under clouded skies. There were trees and flowers, but they were somewhat colourless, and though the by-paths were pleasant, there was little light. There were people walking to and fro over the grass, and many were gathered before a great gateway strongly barred ; but one could see through the bars a fair and most lovely country bathed in sunshine, with groups of people in shining white dresses and faces of surpassing beauty. I noticed that those who stood on this side the gate wore grey garments, and their faces were grave and wistful ; but when I spoke to them, and asked why the gate was shut so that one could not pass through, they only shook their heads sadly and moved away, and I was left alone.

Now there stood close to the gate on the other side a man, very stately and fair to look upon, and as I gazed at him in too much awe to speak, he smiled at me so graciously that I whispered, 'Are you an angel?' and he inclined his head.

'I am the Angel of Forgiveness,' he said, 'and I dwell in this pleasant land which they call the Land of Peace, and where our Lord loves to walk in the cool of the evening. For here are His chosen ones, the Peacemakers, and those "who have come out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb," and, like their Master and the holy Stephen, have forgiven their murderers, and dealt kindly with those who have done them wrong. Therefore they shall be gathered together, and follow their Master when He goes to gather His lilies, and the secret of everlasting peace is theirs; for in their earthly days they loved much, and showed mercy on the unmerciful.'

When I woke my room was flooded with the early morning sunshine. Was it a dream or a vision, I wondered; and then I thought that one day I would tell it to my mother—but not now.

Mentor has more than once called me a dreamer of dreams, but it is perfectly true that at more than one crisis of my life—at moments of abnormal excitement—I have had dreams so strange and suggestive that I have written them down; but I never again had such a dream as this—the remembrance of the dark gateway watched over by the Angel of Peace haunted me for many a day.

When Rebecca brought me my morning cup of tea I thought she looked at me a little strangely, but she was a silent woman, and rarely spoke if she could help it. She must have carried a bad report of my looks, for ten minutes later my mother came to me in her grey quilted dressing-gown, and the thick masses of her grey hair falling below her waist—such beautiful hair—shining like silver in the sunlight; but how pale and sunken her features looked in the strong light!

'Rebecca thinks that you have slept badly, Githa,' she said as she kissed me. 'I would have come to you if I had known that. More than once I listened at your door, but could hear no movement.' There was a new note of gentleness in her voice as she spoke.

'It was nearly morning before I closed my eyes,' I returned, 'but I have had some sleep since then. You have slept badly yourself, mother.' I almost whispered the last word, but she heard it, and a faint tinge of colour came to her face.

'That is nothing new,' she said sadly; 'but it is different for you, dearest. You must just lie still, and Rebecca shall bring you your breakfast.'

I hesitated a moment. I felt strangely weak, and my head was beginning to ache. There was no hurry, as I had decided to take an afternoon train. My father would not be home until five, and I was anxious to avoid Mardie's questionings until I had seen him. Very likely if I tried to dress myself my headache would increase.

'You had better take my advice, Githa,' she went on. 'I will open your window, and the fresh air will do your head good. Close your eyes and try and get a little sleep, and I will tell Sydney not to disturb you'; and then she brought me a warm wrap and threw up the window, and I was too weary to argue the point.

I think I slept a little before my breakfast tray arrived, and my head no longer throbbed so painfully; and by the time Sydney came to me I felt somewhat better, though she gave a shocked exclamation when she saw me.

'Why, Githa, I do not know whether you or Aunt

Yvonne looks the worst, but you both seem to me on the brink of an illness.'

'How can you talk such nonsense, Sydney! I have not slept well, that is all.'

'That is exactly what Aunt Yvonne says, but'—with a wistful look—'there is more behind. I am sure of that. Why are you going home, Githa, when you have only just come? Aunt Yvonne says that she will explain things when you are gone, but it is very hard to wait.'

'I am very sorry, Sydney dear, but I am too tired to talk now.'

'That means that I am to ask no more questions. Never mind, you poor thing, you shall not be worried, and I will be patient for a few hours; but if any trouble has come to you or Aunt Yvonne I know you will not leave me in the dark longer than you can help.'

'No indeed, you may be sure of that'; and then she gave a gentle sigh, and stole away on tiptoe. That was so like Sydney. She was always so ready to efface herself, to stand aside until those she loved needed her. But she was not happy about either of us, I could see that.

I lay and brooded heavily until it was time to rise and dress. When I saw myself in the glass I felt that Sydney's evident anxiety was fully justified. I certainly looked ill. Even my lips were pale, and there were ink stains under my eyes. Was I only seventeen, I wondered—sweet seventeen? I felt I had grown years older!

When I went downstairs my mother made no comment on my appearance, probably because Sydney was in the room. She only remarked that luncheon was a

little earlier than usual, and that as I had had a poor breakfast she hoped I would do my best to make a good meal ; but she certainly did not set me an example. Sydney watched us furtively, and tried to cover up our silence by cheerful remarks.

When I went to my room to put on my hat my mother followed me.

'You are not fit to go, Githa,' she said in a troubled tone, 'but it would be cruel to keep you—I can see that.'

'It is so good of you to spare me, mother.'

'I do so most unwillingly, I assure you, and I shall certainly not have a moment's peace until you come back. No, I did not mean to say that,' rather remorsefully, as she saw my face ; 'I shall live in hopes of your coming back very soon.'

'You may depend that I shall come as soon as I can.' Then in a whisper, 'Have you any message for father?' but she shook her head.

'You are all the message I need send. I have carried out my part of the compact faithfully. Now I hear the carriage, and Rebecca is ready.' She embraced me hurriedly as she spoke, and then half pushed me away. I think, nay, I am sure, that she could not trust herself to linger over the leave-taking. She did not accompany me downstairs, but as we drove away I saw her standing at the landing window, and as I looked at her she waved her hand and hurried away. Poor mother! she looked like a Mater Dolorosa at that moment.

Rebecca took no notice of me, and I was at leisure to indulge in my own thoughts. But they were to be interrupted in a most unexpected way, for just as we were taking our places in the train the guard opened the door for a gentleman.

'All the other carriages are crowded, sir,' he said civilly, 'and I am sure this young lady will not object'; and to my astonishment I saw it was Mr. Carlyon. He looked equally surprised when he recognised me.

Rebecca gave him up her seat, and ensconced herself at the other end with her book—she was a great reader,—and Mr. Carlyon settled himself in the opposite corner. But as he bent forward to speak to me his manner expressed some concern.

'You are surely not leaving Bayfield already, Miss Darnell? I understood you had come for a fortnight at least.'

'I am coming back in a few days—at least I hope so. I only want to speak to my father. I wish to consult him about something, and I shall finish my visit later on.' I tried to speak naturally, but I am sure I failed, for his face became rather grave.

He was silent for a few minutes, then he leant forward again. He was evidently unwilling that Rebecca should hear him, but there was no danger of that; she was already absorbed in her book, and Mr. Carlyon spoke in a low voice.

'You are in some trouble, I fear, or you are not well. Is there anything I can do to help you?' His voice was so kind that the tears rushed to my eyes, and I dared not trust myself to speak, but again he understood me.

'No, do not answer me, I can see for myself, and you are not fit to talk. I am going to read my paper, and if you will take my advice you will just close your eyes and try to rest.' I think I must have looked at him a little pitifully when he said that, for he went on very gently, 'One can rest even in trouble, only,' in a still lower voice, 'be careful to hold very tightly to

your heavenly Father's hand, or you may lose yourself and get hurt'; and then he unfolded his paper as though he were anxious to shield me from observation.

No, I was not fit to talk, my nerves had not yet recovered themselves, but the tears I shed were quiet and healing; somehow that silent sympathy seemed to soothe and comfort me, and my head felt less strained. Mr. Carlyon left me undisturbed. Once he closed the window in a tunnel, and another time he touched my arm and put a smelling-bottle into my hand. 'It is wonderfully efficacious; please try it, Miss Darnell, it will do your head good,' and, as I thanked him languidly, he took up his paper again.

At the end of our journey Rebecca came to me. 'I am to put you into a cab, miss, and then my mistress told me that I was to take the next train back'; but before I could answer her Mr. Carlyon interposed.

'Forgive me for interfering, but you are surely not going to drive to Cheyne Walk alone?'

'Oh yes,' I returned listlessly, 'I know the way quite well'; but he hardly seemed to listen.

'Will you tell your mistress,' he observed, addressing Rebecca, 'that I shall drive with Miss Darnell and see her safely home; I think she will be glad to know that'; and then, without asking my leave, he called up a hansom and put me in it, and quietly placed himself beside me; and when the driver had received his instructions from Rebecca and we had left the station, he said in rather an apologetic tone—

'Forgive me if I am taking too great a liberty, but if you could see yourself at this moment you would know that I could not do otherwise.'

'You are very kind,' I murmured; 'but indeed there was no need to trouble you.'

'It is no question of my trouble,' he returned. 'Besides, you are not taking me much out of my way, and I should not have been comfortable if I had not seen you safely home; I only wish I could do more for you.'

'You have done a great deal,' for I wanted him to know how grateful I felt. 'I am behaving rather childishly I fear, Mr. Carlyon, but I have had a shock—perhaps I ought not to call it a trouble—but I hardly know how I feel.'

'Perhaps I understand more than you think,' and Mr. Carlyon spoke in rather a significant tone. 'One has strange intuitions sometimes, and one has come to me this afternoon—no, I cannot explain; another time, perhaps, when you are less confused and unhappy.'

'It is just that,' I returned in a trembling voice. 'I am so bewildered that I hardly know whether I am in trouble or not—it would not be right to tell you about it; but I think you could have helped me, because you have been in trouble yourself.'

'You are right,' in a low tone. 'But I trust you may be spared such sorrow as I have known. Mercifully the wind is tempered to the shorn lamb.' Then with a change of tone, 'Do you remember what that glorious old heathen Marcus Aurelius said, "We are born to be serviceable to one another"? I want you to promise me something, Miss Darnell: if I can ever do anything to help you or yours, will you ask me to do it? Here we are at the end of our journey, and I should like to have that promise.' In spite of its gentleness there was a touch of priestly authority in his voice which seemed to thrill me; but although our acquaintance had been short, I felt he was a man that

one could trust absolutely, and a sudden impulse of gratitude made me put out my hand to him.

'Thank you, I think I can safely promise that ; you have been very, very kind.'

He smiled and shook his head : 'Then there is nothing more to say but God bless you' ; and then, as I left him and went up the steps, he waited until the door was open before he re-entered the hansom, and Hallett had closed it again before he drove away.

CHAPTER XVIII

FATHER AND I

To have suffered much is like knowing many languages ; you have learnt to understand all, and to make yourself intelligible to all.—ANON.

Add not more trouble to a heart that is vexed.—ECCLESIASTICUS.

When God puts a burden upon you
He puts His own arm underneath.

ANON.

I SAW a surprised and almost an alarmed expression on Hallett's face as he closed the door behind me. 'Miss Githa,' he exclaimed with the familiarity of an old servant, 'I trust there is nothing wrong that has brought you back so sudden-like'; but I shook my head.

'Has my father come home, Hallett?' I asked presently.

'Yes, ma'am, the master had luncheon at home to-day, and I have just taken him his tea in the library'; but here he stopped abruptly, for the sound of our voices had reached father, and he came hastily towards us.

'What on earth does this mean, Githa?' he said quite sharply; 'you have come home alone, without even sending me a telegram.' Then his manner changed

when he saw my face. Perhaps he understood that I was trembling so that I could hardly stand, for he put his arm round me and drew me into the library, and when poor old Hallett would have followed us he checked him.

'I will ring if I want anything ; please see that we are not disturbed' ; and then he made me sit down in the big easy-chair, and helped me to remove my hat and veil ; but how cold his hands were ! and he looked at me anxiously.

'You are ill, darling ; I have never seen you look so pale. Perhaps, after all, we had better send for Mrs. Marland,' and actually his hand was on the bell, but I stopped him.

'No, no, I want no one but you—no one but you. Oh, father,' with a little sob I could not restrain, 'I was obliged to come home, I could not stay away another hour ; I only wanted this,' laying my head on his shoulder as I spoke, 'and to tell you how dearly, how dearly I love you.' I am sure he understood, for he held me very closely without speaking ; but his dear face had grown suddenly wan and haggard.

'Does this mean that you know all, Githa ?' he asked presently ; his voice was strained and a little hoarse.

'Yes, I know all that is necessary for me to know,' I half whispered.

'And what is that ? Do not keep me in suspense, darling, I cannot bear it ! I have a right to know everything that has passed between—you and—her' ; and his intense anxiety was so evident that it nerved me to make an effort.

'I will try to tell you, father. I know now, though I cannot realise it, that Cousin Yvonne is my mother. She told me so last night when we were alone together.

I think the shock was too great, for it made me quite ill and giddy, but she was so dear and good to me.'

'My poor little Gipsy!'

'I could not believe it at first; for all these years I have thought my mother was dead.'

'Yes, I know,' he returned almost angrily, 'but it was no fault of mine; I told Yvonne—your mother I mean—that we should be acting a lie, and that it would lead to complications, but I could not move her.'

'Father dear, I think it would have been better if I had known.'

He sighed assent to this. 'Well, Githa, what else did your mother tell you?'

'Only this, that when I was a little child there was trouble between you'; and here I rested my cheek against his hand. I could hardly say the words, but I knew he was determined to know all—'She told me you had done her some wrong, which made her leave her home'; here I heard a suppressed groan, and hurried on in a trembling voice. 'She said that she did not wish to tell me—more,—and that she had meant to take me with her, but at the last moment her heart failed her, and she left me to be a comfort to you in your loneliness.'

'God bless her for that deed of mercy!' he muttered, and then he put me away from him, and his face worked with emotion. 'I think if she had taken you I should have gone mad with remorse and loneliness. Child, listen to me a moment: your mother is a good woman, she is as spotless as a saint, and to my dying day I shall love and honour her, although that marble statue beside us is not so hard as she has been to me. O my God!' he continued passionately, 'I know too well that

I wronged her, but good women have forgiven before now ; but when——' here I stopped him by laying my hand against his lips.

'Father, hush, I will not hear, I will not—I will not! the trouble, whatever it may be, is between you two, it is for no one else to judge—certainly not your child. Dearest, dearest!' clasping him tightly round the neck, 'if you look like that you will break my heart. If you have done wrong, you have repented and suffered! All these years you have been sad and lonely ; you have wanted her, and hoped that she would come back to us! Oh, father, the dearest father that any child could have, let me comfort you a little, for I know from her own lips that my mother loves you still!'

He did not answer—I think he could not ; his face was hidden in his hands, and his strong frame was shaking with suppressed emotion, but I knelt beside him, clasping him silently until that moment of agony had passed. If only she had seen and heard him, she must have forgiven him!

'Father, I do not think I could love you more than I do to-night ; if you are unhappy, I shall be unhappy too.'

He raised his head when I said that, but I could see there were tears in his eyes. 'My little blessing,' he said tenderly, and then I crept into his arms and for a long time we were silent. This was all I wanted—to be near him, and to make him realise that not even this should come between us.

I think there was something almost sacramental in that long, peaceful silence, as though some hallowed presence—perhaps the Angel of Forgiveness—was standing with folded wings in the soft evening light. I was very weary, but I was no longer giddy and confused. A certain clarity of vision seemed to

come to me. If ever a woman had a mission, surely I had mine: the work so difficult in the doing, and yet so unutterably sweet and holy to a daughter's heart—the bringing back the wife and mother to her rightful place in the home.

How long I should have knelt there resting against him I do not know ; only, father suddenly remembered that I was far from well, and needed food after my journey. Tea was still on the table, but no one had touched it. In moments of intense excitement bodily wants are forgotten.

'My poor dear Gipsy, you are utterly exhausted, but it is too late for tea now. It is just dinner-time, and we are neither of us ready. I should like to have you with me, if you feel fit for it.' And of course I assured him that nothing would induce me to leave him, and then we went upstairs hand in hand.

Mardie met me at my bedroom door. Her face was full of concern.

'Oh, my dear,' she said in a fretted voice, 'I have been nearly distracted all these hours since Hallett told me how sadly you were looking ; and you are like a ghost, Miss Githa, surely, and your eyes twice their size.'

'Never mind, Mardie dear,' I returned in a weary voice. 'I am too tired to talk to-night, and I want you to help me get ready for dinner.'

'You are more fit for bed,' replied the good creature in a vexed tone ; but as I made no response to this—and indeed I knew she was right—she went away grumbling to herself about the blindness of people who were half-killing her lamb ; and all the time she dressed me she kept dropping little hints, as though she suspected trouble, but I gave her no opening, only just before I went downstairs I said to her—

'Mardie dear, I do not mean to be unkind, but indeed I cannot talk to-night'; and then I kissed her, and she seemed more satisfied.

Father was waiting for me. 'Why did you trouble to dress?' he said, with a glance at my white gown; and then the gong sounded, and we went into the dining-room. To my relief, he insisted that my place should be changed, and that I should sit beside him, and he seemed scarcely able to eat his dinner for watching me. Except a word or two, there was no attempt at any conversation, and once I saw Hallett looking at his master with evident uneasiness. How thankful we both were when the meal was over and we were at liberty to return to the library.

I told father that I meant to stay with him a little, but he shook his head dubiously.

I am not sure that I ought to keep you up, Gipsy, but I do not know how to bring myself to part with you.' But, after all, there was little talk between us that night; but I think it made him happier to know that I was beside him, that I understood, and that nothing on earth could come between us.

Mardie was waiting for me when I got upstairs. I think she saw how spent and exhausted I was, for she waited on me as though I were still her nursling, and never left me until my head was on the pillow.

I slept like a worn-out child that night, and felt more like my old self when I woke the next morning; for I was young, and youth is synonymous with hope, and the spring sunshine was flooding the room. As I drank my tea Mardie came with a message from my father: he wanted to know how I had slept. I assured her quite cheerfully that I was much better, and that my head had ceased to ache; but she did not

appear quite satisfied. She shook her head in rather a tragical manner, and I knew my return message would be enriched by copious annotations of her own.

When I entered the breakfast-room an hour later father met me, and taking my face between his hands, looked at it a little anxiously.

'You have haunted me the greater part of the night, Gipsy,' he said gently, and there was a tired look about his eyes which told me he had not slept well. 'I could not forget your pitiful little face—but there,' rather abruptly, 'we will not talk until we have had our breakfast. I think we both want air and sunshine—would you like me to drive you to Richmond, darling, or shall we just stroll to Battersea Park?'

The last suggestion pleased me best. At this early hour Battersea Park would be quiet and pleasant, and we could easily find some nook away from children and nursemaids. I knew Roy would prefer this plan, for of all delights he enjoyed barking at the ducks in the pond. He would scamper madly round the edge of the pond, all fuss and fury, but he never attempted to go into the water.

We soon found a quiet bench, and then father began to talk. He asked me at once if I intended going back to Bayfield. 'As you brought no luggage with you,' he continued, 'I guessed that this was your intention.'

I told him that he was right, and that I had promised my mother to return in a few days. 'It is Tuesday; if you can spare me, father, I think I will write and tell her to expect me on Saturday.'

He assented quietly to this. 'But you will not stay long, Gip,' he added hastily.

'No, not this time—only ten days or so'; and he seemed relieved when I said this.

'I do not know what we are to do for the future,' he continued, and there was deep depression in his voice. 'I do not want to be selfish, and I suppose your mother ought to have her share; but I simply cannot endure home without you. Cheyne Walk is the abomination of desolation without you, Gipsy; besides, my daughter is the mistress of the house.' He spoke as though he were defending himself against some one.

'Yes, I understand,' was my answer; 'but you are not selfish, father; you know that I never like leaving you. But what are we to do—there is mother?' and as I said this the memory of her as I last saw her came back to me, when she stood by the landing window in her grey gown, looking like a Mater Dolorosa.

I noticed that father winced perceptibly when I mentioned her. I was determined to school myself to pronouncing her name, that in time I might learn to say it more naturally. My own deadness of feeling with regard to her had alarmed me. I did not understand then as fully as I did afterwards that I was jealous of any strong influence which threatened his monopoly of my affection. All these years it had been father and I, or, as he had more than once playfully expressed it, 'Darnell and Co.'; it would not be too much to say that we had been all in all to each other; and as I grew up to womanhood this bond had only strengthened and deepened. I was the light of his eyes; I knew that well; the one ewe lamb that had been spared to him out of his life's wreck, who metaphorically had drunk of his cup and lay in his bosom, and he could not do without me.

How the knowledge of this oneness of sympathy between us must have tortured my mother and added

to her loneliness! Shut out of her woman's paradise by her own inexorable and unyielding will, by a pride which could not stoop to pity and forgive, she yet suffered all the pangs of outraged maternity; she had to hide her mother's love, to stifle the cry of her heart, for the child she so dearly loved. Alas! who could restore to her these past years when from afar she watched over my childhood? Could any aftermath of tenderness make up for the years that the locust had eaten?

I was very full of pity for her as these thoughts crossed my mind, and yet—and yet my deepest sympathy was for my father. Surely he had suffered and humbled himself enough; all this long estrangement—this cruel separation—was her doing, not his. I knew without words that at any moment, if she had chosen, she could have come back and taken her rightful place.

My father sighed and moved restlessly as I made my little speech—'There is mother.'

'Yes, yes, I know; do you think I ever forget her for a moment? If she had only sent me a message—but no, it is hopeless. My darling, I shall expect you to help me in this; you must let me know what you consider due to your mother, for I cannot trust myself in this matter.'

I knew what he meant—that any further sacrifice on his part was well-nigh impossible to him, that he wanted me too much to spare me willingly; but he was giving me a harder task than he guessed.

'Whatever you decide ought to be done, Githa, shall be done; but there is no need to settle this in a hurry. Think over it, dear, and remember you must help me not to be selfish.' Then I slipped my hand in his.

'I am selfish too, father. But you are right, and we

will decide nothing in a hurry. There is one thing I want to say: all this secrecy has been a mistake; in my opinion it has been absolutely wrong.'

'And in mine too, Gipsy,' he said gravely.

'Yes, dearest, I know that; but at least we may do our best to set wrong right.'

'You mean that you wish our friends to know about your mother.'

'Yes,' rather excitedly, 'our friends, our household—every one connected with us. I would have no more mysteries and false impressions.'

'You are right, my child'; but he shivered a little as though the task would be a painful one. 'If you wish it I will speak to Hallett to-night.'

'No, dear, you shall not do that. I have thought of a better plan: I will tell Mardie, and she will manage the rest,' for I was anxious to spare him all I could. For his dear sake I could be strong and courageous. 'But, father, there is Aunt Cosie; surely she comes first!' Then he smiled as though faintly amused.

'Aunt Cosie has known all along, darling; there is no need to tell her anything. She has always strongly disapproved of your mother's conditions, and has blamed me most severely for what she calls my weak compromise; and I dare say she is right. It has led to a serious breach between her and Yvonne—your mother I mean—and they have not met for years. I should like you to go and see her to-morrow, Gipsy. I think you had better go alone. She will be thankful to know that the truth has been told at last, and I dare say her wise old head will help us to unravel the tangled skein.' And then, of course, I told him that I would go to Fairlawn the next day.

CHAPTER XIX

'IT IS SAD AS DEATH'

Let no man shrink from the bitter tonics
Of grief and yearning, and need and strife ;
For the rarest chords in the soul's harmonics
Are found in the minor strains of life.

E. WHEELER WILCOX.

Is it a dream? Let us shape it to action.
Mighty with truth's irresistible strength,
Bold with the courage that fears no distraction,
Shall we not climb to the vision at length?

C. M. NOEL.

FATHER told me that evening that there would be an important meeting of directors the next morning, and that he must drive into town early. He suggested also that I should accompany him part of the way, and that he should drop me at Fairlawn. 'It will not make much difference to me, and we can start a little earlier,' he went on.

'You might as well stay to luncheon, Gipsy, for I am not likely to return before tea-time, I have rather a long day before me'; and I readily acquiesced in this arrangement.

I shrank from the idea of a solitary day, and under the circumstances I was unwilling to seek Miss Redford's society; so the idea of spending the day at Fairlawn seemed to me rather pleasant than otherwise.

I was very fond of Aunt Cosie ; she was such a peaceful sort of person, and somehow she never disappointed me in my childish troubles. She had always been so kind and sympathetic, and I felt assured that she would not fail me now.

We talked very little during the drive ; but as we came in sight of Fairlawn father put his hand on mine.

'You need not be nervous, Gipsy,' he said kindly, 'your Aunt Cosie will be very good to you, and you need have no reserves with her,' and then he smiled at me, and the next moment the carriage stopped.

Aunt Cosie was sitting as usual in her sunny drawing-room. She had just given her orders to her cook, and was reading the *Times* before she wrote her letters. Later on she would take her morning walk or potter in the garden. Her habits were like clockwork, and she seldom varied them. 'A lonely old woman is a law to herself,' she said once when father was teasing her and calling her 'the clockwork lady,' declaring in his droll way that she wound herself up afresh every morning for her round of duties. 'Ah, Philip, my dear,' she went on, 'it is no wonder that you cannot enter into an old wife's feelings ; but I always was an orderly sort of body from a girl, and I like my day's machinery to be well oiled and never out of gear. A little method makes "the trivial round, the common task," ever so much easier.'

Aunt Cosie put down her paper with a surprised exclamation when she saw me.

'Why, Githa, child,' she observed, 'I thought you were at Bayfield. Has anything prevented your going?'

'No, Aunt Cosie, I came home unexpectedly because I wanted to speak to father ; but I am going back on Saturday.'

I thought Aunt Cosie looked at me a little keenly when I said that. Then she folded her paper in a resolute manner.

'And you have come to spend the day with me, have you not, my dear?'

'If I shall not be in the way, Aunt Cosie. Father has an important meeting, and a good deal of business, so I need not be home until five—so if you can keep me until then.' But Aunt Cosie paid no heed to this tentative remark.

'Go and take off your things in the blue room,' she returned quietly; 'and, Githa, if you will just ring the bell as you pass, I have an order to give.' Of course, the dear old thing was thinking of luncheon. She would insist on having my favourite pudding or some special dainty, and I would not spoil her pleasure by telling her that I had no heart for such things. When I returned to the room her wool work was beside her, but she had not taken it up. As I came towards her she pointed mutely to the great square footstool beside her, and I thought her sweet old face looked unusually grave.

'You poor child,' she said in such a pitying voice, 'have you come of your own accord to talk to me, or has Philip, your father I mean, sent you?' and then I knew that she understood all about it; indeed, she informed me afterwards, the first glance at my face told her everything without a word.

I felt an intense relief when she said this. She was smoothing my hair with her soft old hand as she spoke, in such a comforting way.

'Oh, Aunt Cosie, how could you guess?' I half whispered; but she only gave an inexplicable little smile, and went on with her caressing manipulations.

'Father wished me to come. He said you knew all about it, and that I could tell you anything I liked. Oh, I have been so unhappy, so perplexed and miserable, and all life seemed spoiled somehow and the sunshine blotted out'; and here I buried my face in her lap, unable to go on.

'You poor little child!' and here her hand rested rather heavily on my hair. And then she said something that sounded very strange to me—'Are you so unhappy, Githa, to find you have a good mother living?'

How shockingly that sounded!

'No, oh no. Of course I never meant that, and all my life I have been so fond of Cousin Yvonne.'

'But you find it difficult to realise that she is your mother. I think I understand how you feel, Githa—it has been a great shock.'

'Yes, that is just it.'

'Let us talk a little about it, dear. I think I can find some way to help you, but I must know more first'; and then, with much tender encouragement and a few judicious questions, she drew from me the account of that Sunday evening, and when I broke down, unable to proceed, she petted and soothed me as though I were still the child Githa.

'Oh, the pity of it,' I heard her say half to herself,—'the cruel waste—the unnecessary suffering!' Then in a quieter tone, 'Githa, I dare say your father has told you that from the first I disapproved of all this secrecy. You have been allowed to grow up in the belief that your mother was dead'; but I would not let her go on.

'It was not father's fault, Aunt Cosie.'

'He did not propose it, you mean. Yes, at heart, I know, he absolutely disapproved of your mother's con-

ditions; but it was wrong and weak of him to give in to her. How often I have told him that!

'Yes, I know; and of course it was a grievous mistake. Oh, Aunt Cosie, if you could only realise the shock it was to me!'

'I think I do realise it, Githa. Have you any idea how changed you are, my poor child? You look years older since the day you came to wish me good-bye, and yet it is not a week ago.'

I was silent. I certainly felt years older, and something told me that I should never be quite the same Githa again.

'It was living a lie, and that is always wrong,' she went on. 'Githa, from what you have told me, your mother seems to have said very little to you. I can understand the difficulty, and Yvonne, in spite of all her faults, can be generous; but it seems to me, putting myself in your place, that you could hardly comprehend how this strange and unnatural separation took place'; but I was so afraid of what she might be going to say, that I interrupted her almost abruptly.

'Forgive me, Aunt Cosie, but I know all that I wish or mean to know. Why my parents have decided to separate is their affair, not mine. That is why I came home that evening, that I might tell father that nothing—nothing should ever make a difference between us. If I ever loved him in my life, I love him a hundred times more now when I know how unhappy he has been.'

'And your mother, Githa?' Then a chill pang crossed my heart.

'I have always loved her, even though I was ignorant that she was my mother'; but my voice was a little cold. 'But, Aunt Cosie, I do not understand her. I

think—I always shall think—that she need not have left us.’ But the next moment I would have gladly withdrawn my impulsive words ; had I not said that it was not for me to judge my parents ?

‘My dear child, it nearly broke her heart to go and leave you behind.’

‘Yes, I know, and I ought not to have said that. You must forget it, Aunt Cosie. I mean to love my mother, and if she will only come back to us, there is nothing on earth I would not do to make her happy.’

‘I fear—I greatly fear—that she will not do that.’

‘Why should she not do it,’ I returned with much agitation, ‘when we both love her and want her so badly ? She is so dear and good, why is it so difficult for her to forgive, after all these years too ?’

‘Why, indeed,’ and Aunt Cosie sighed, and there was a troubled look on her face ; and then she murmured under her breath, ‘“Until seventy times seven,” those were the Master’s words’ ; and then we were both silent. Aunt Cosie seemed absorbed in her own reflections, and I was unwilling to disturb her ; but she presently roused herself with a sigh. ‘It is sad—it is sad as death, Githa, and I cannot imagine what you will all do in the future ; your mother has claims.’

‘I can never leave father. He is my first duty, Aunt Cosie.’

‘I was sure you would say that,’ she returned quietly, ‘and under the peculiar circumstances I dare say you are right. But a mother’s claims must be very strong, and I do not see, my poor child, how you are to satisfy them.’

I did not see it either, and my heart felt as heavy as a millstone as she spoke, but nothing would induce me to give up hope of a final reconciliation. With

some difficulty, and with many tears, I tried to convey this to her mind, and she seemed so touched that she could scarcely refrain from weeping too. 'Dear child, dear child,' she said softly, again and again, and then something prompted me to tell her my strange dream. I think she was a little awed and startled, and although she said it was beautiful, she looked at me rather uneasily.

'It was an extraordinary dream for a girl of your age, Githa. Your brain must have been overwrought, my dear.'

'Aunt Cosie, one day I mean to tell my mother that dream.'

She nodded gravely; then she suddenly put her hands on my shoulder.

'Githa, my dear, there is something I want to say to you, and that you must not refuse to hear. Surely,' in rather a hurt voice, 'you can trust me,' as I unconsciously shrank under her soft, constraining touch.

'Trust you—of course I do, dear Aunt Cosie, but——'

'There are no buts, Githa,' with a quiet firmness that subdued my nervousness; 'and if you love your father you will not refuse to hear what I think it right to tell you.'

'It is true that when you were a little child there was trouble between your parents, and that your poor mother had much to bear.'

'Aunt Cosie, please, please——' But she only pressed her hands more firmly on my shoulders and went on.

'No doubt Philip—your father, I mean—was to blame. As a young man he was weak and easily led, and he came under a bad influence. I know all the circumstances, Githa,—far more than your mother

does. I know everything, from Philip's own lips, and I can tell his daughter, what I never could bring her mother to believe, that things were not as bad as they appeared to be.'

'And my mother would not believe you?'

'No, my dear ; she said I was prejudiced in Philip's favour, and that I always took his side. I never saw a woman so proud and so determined to wreck her own life and other people's ; she could not forgive. She told me so, with a despairing look on her poor white face ; and I could do no more for either of them.'

'And yet he had done no great wrong?' Then Aunt Cosie coloured and seemed a little perplexed.

'My dear child, in one sense he had wronged her cruelly, for he had made her suffer very bitter pain ; but though he acted foolishly and recklessly, and gave her just cause for her unhappiness, things never came to the worst. At the very edge of the precipice he came to his right senses. I always said a miracle saved him.'

I listened in breathless interest to this vague explanation. In spite of my assurances that no wrongdoing on my beloved father's part should ever come between us, it was an immense relief to hear that things were not so terrible as I feared. Aunt Cosie smiled again as she read my face.

'I am telling you the whole truth, Githa.'

'Yes ; and I am so thankful to have heard it. But, Aunt Cosie, do you see, it only makes it all the more strange that my mother should have left us.'

'There is no use entering into that, Githa,' she returned sadly. 'There were temperamental difficulties on your mother's side which hindered reconciliation. If she could only have brought herself to believe

the truth—if she could have cleared her mind of preconceived notions and prejudices—she might have been more reasonable ; but at that time she had so exaggerated her own misery that she was thrown off her balance. I think a gentler nature would have forgiven even then ; but Yvonne's indomitable pride and self-will would not hear of yielding, and so,' with a heavy sigh, 'they were best apart.'

'Aunt Cosie, you cannot think so now ; they are both unhappy, and they do care for each other so dreadfully.'

She seemed faintly amused at my childish way of expressing it ; but I saw she was not sanguine, though she was unwilling to depress me. She patted my cheek softly.

'Dear child,' she said affectionately, 'Heaven forbid that I should say a word to discourage you ; there are miracles even now. Follow the instinct of your own loving heart, and every blessing attend you.' And as she kissed me, I saw that there were tears in her dear old eyes, and that she was strongly moved.

I saw that she did not wish to pursue the subject, so I suggested that we should go for a little walk, and she hailed my proposal with an air of relief ; and I think the spring sunshine did us both a world of good.

We spent the afternoon pleasantly ; and nothing more passed between us on the subject of my visit, until I bade her good-bye, and then she detained me a moment.

'You are really going back to Bayfield on Saturday, Githa,' she said a little wistfully.

'Yes, Aunt Cosie, but I shall not remain long this time. Have you—have you any message ?'

She flushed a little at my question, and hesitated.

'It is long since we exchanged messages,' she returned rather sadly. 'Still, perhaps it will be as well to make a beginning. Will you tell Yvonne—I mean your mother—that I am glad and thankful that you know everything?'

'And is that all, auntie?'

'No; you may give her my love, if she cares to have it, and tell her—yes, Githa, you may tell her this—that if she values her child's peace of mind, as well as her own, she will come to me of her own accord, and let an old woman tell her the truth'; and then she gave me a little nod of dismissal.

But in spite of all her kindness and gentle sympathy a heavy weight still lay on my heart. If Aunt Cosie, who knew all the circumstances, and who understood my mother's complex nature, was so hopeless of results, was it likely that I, scarcely more than a child, without knowledge and experience, could expect to surmount such difficulties? A sense of my utter helplessness almost crushed me; the cold wind of disillusion seemed to chill me as I walked along. 'What am I to do? How am I to set about it?' I thought. 'I feel as though I were in fog, and could not see my way. Shall I ever see it, I wonder?' still more hopelessly, and then a quaint Eastern proverb came into my mind, 'God makes the blind bird's nest.' What depths of meaning were concealed in that saying! If for the dim-eyed fluttering thing there was shelter and help, surely an ignorant and helpless girl might find guidance. And these other more sacred words came into my mind, 'I will lead them by ways that they have not known'; and then it seemed to me I was no longer afraid.

CHAPTER XX

AN OPEN SECRET

It may be little we can do
To help another, it is true ;
But better is a little spark
Of kindness when the way is dark. . . .
See how, everywhere,
Love comforts, strengthens, helps, and saves us all,
What opportunities of good befall
To make life sweet and fair.

CELIA THAXTER.

I WAS surprised to find that father never questioned me at all about my visit. He gave me one of his quick, searching looks when he came in ; then he sank into his chair with a weary air as though he were extremely tired, and asked me to give him a cup of tea. As he seemed out of spirits, I proposed going on with the book we had been reading aloud, and he assented gratefully. He always said that my voice had a soothing effect on him ; but this evening it acted as a narcotic. I knew he had slept badly, and I was relieved to find that before half-an-hour had passed he was in a peaceful slumber. I went on reading for another ten minutes, then I slipped away so quietly that he was not disturbed. The long sleep refreshed him, and he seemed more rested and like himself when

we sat down to dinner, and we talked on ordinary everyday topics with some degree of cheerfulness. I saw that he was anxious to keep up appearances before the servants, and I tried to second him to the best of my ability. As we went back to the library he put his arm round me—'So Aunt Cosie was good to you, Gipsy.'

'Oh yes, father; she was as dear and nice as possible.'

'She has always been my best friend,' he returned in a tone of deep feeling. 'I suppose it is natural, darling, that one should find the greatest comfort in the friends who never lose their faith in one. My Cousin Constance has been staunch to me through good and evil report; she has a heart of gold, and no amount of digging can exhaust her mine of charity—if others could but learn from her.' Then I knew that he was alluding to my mother.

I liked to hear him speak in this grateful, appreciative way of dear Aunt Cosie, but he did not pursue the subject, and the next moment he asked me to play to him. I spent most of the evening going through his favourite symphonies and sonatas, and when my fingers were weary I sat down beside him. He was still in no mood for talking, but he drew me closer to him until my head rested on his shoulder; and so we remained in a peaceful sense of companionship, which needs no words, until it grew late; then silently wrapping me in his arms, with an earnest kiss or two he dismissed me to my rest.

I was too tired to talk to Mardie that night, and it was not until the following evening that I found my opportunity. Father and I had spent the whole day together. We had a long ride before luncheon, and in the after-

noon he took me to see a fine collection of pictures, and we afterwards had tea in the studio of an artist friend of his. He had just completed a picture for the Royal Academy, and was anxious for father's opinion. I think the little change did us both good. Cyril Brodrick was rather Bohemian in his tastes, but some of his friends were delightful, and one was always sure to find a pleasant social gathering on Thursday afternoon. In the evening I read aloud and played, but I could not trust my voice to sing. I am quite sure father guessed the reason, for he did not ask me for any of his favourite songs, and contented himself with Chopin and Beethoven; his tact was never at fault.

I went upstairs earlier that night, for I was determined to talk to Mardie before I slept. I had noticed a trace of anxiety in her manner the previous evening, and she had lingered in my room rather unnecessarily as though to give me an opportunity. I felt sure she suspected that all was not right with me, and was far from easy in her mind.

To-night I hurried my preparations for bed, and cut short rather ruthlessly the hair-brushing in which she took such pride and delight. She was never weary of commenting on the length and thickness of my brown mane. 'Few young ladies had such lovely hair,' she would say quite seriously, and she even assured me that it swept the ground when I sat down.

I confess that I liked to hear her praises of its softness and gloss, for no girl of seventeen is quite devoid of vanity, but to-night I begged her to arrange it quickly in the loose plait that I always wore at night; and when my head was safely on the pillow I asked her

to come and sit beside me, and the dear old thing did not hesitate for a moment.

'You have something to tell me, dearie,' she whispered, and her voice was full of understanding and sympathy, as though she guessed trouble had touched me.

'Yes, and there is much to tell,' was my answer. 'Mardie, do you know that my mother is not dead after all?'

I had been a little abrupt, for I felt her start at this, but again there was no hesitation.

'Yes, Miss Githa, my dear,' she returned gravely. 'Somehow I always knew that from the first, though no one ever told me so outright.'

'No one? Are you quite sure, Mardie?'

'Perfectly sure, dearie. I only guessed it from something Mrs. Bevan once said,—it was only a word or two, and she never dreamt that I understood her. But when she went away I said to myself, "The poor lady is living, but they don't mean the child to know it."'

I pondered over this surprising piece of intelligence. Mardie knew. She had guessed, had pieced stray words together in her clever way. I had now to find out how much she knew. To my astonishment her knowledge was absolutely nil.

'I only knew for certain that your mother was alive,' she said quietly, 'and that the master had a sore heart. All the world could see that he was in grievous trouble.'

'But surely, Mardie dear, you guessed more than that.' Then she drew herself up in almost a dignified manner for so small a woman.

'It is not for a servant, however trusted and esteemed, to pry into her master's private concerns,

Miss Githa, my dear. Your father is a kind, good-hearted man, and none of us has ever known him to be unfair to man, woman, or child. You should just hear Mr. Hallett speak of the master. He fairly worships him. Hallett knows as much as I do, and perhaps it will be no harm to repeat a speech he once made when you were a tiny mite between five or six. Hallett had only been twelve months at St. Olave's Lodge then, but from the first I knew he was to be trusted.

"I don't know what your opinion may be, Mrs. Marland," he said in a vexed sort of voice, "but it is my firm belief that the master is an ill-used man. No one could see him with that child and doubt it. When our young lady has left him of a night, I have seen him sitting over his books and papers and the look in his eyes would have made your heart ache. It is no business of ours, of course, but——" but here I clutched Mardie's sleeve to stop her, for I was afraid to let her go on.

'Hallett knows as well as you that my mother is not dead?' I asked. And she nodded assent.

'Yes, Miss Githa, and Mrs. Kennedy too; we have often wondered where the poor lady could be; but there, as Hallett said, it is none of our business. There are plenty of cupboards in many households where there is the skeleton of a secret trouble, for there's sore afflictions in this life, and it is not always the worst of troubles to stand by an open grave.'

Mardie's homely philosophy was seldom at fault. I saw she was trying to repress her intense curiosity, and that she was longing for me to tell her more.

'Mardie, dear,' I said slowly, 'last Sunday evening I had a great shock; and,' the tears rising to my eyes, 'I

am afraid that life will never seem quite the same to me again. No,' as she uttered an inarticulate exclamation of sympathy, 'do not interrupt me—let me go on. On Sunday morning I believed that my mother lay in some quiet grave,—a few hours later I met her face to face.'

'My lamb, my precious lamb,' fondling my hands.

'Hush, Mardie, for I have not finished. My mother is a good woman, and I have known and loved her all my life. She is—Cousin Yvonne.'

Again I had been too abrupt. My dear old nurse was so shocked and surprised that she could not speak. She looked quite dazed with the news.

'Am I awake or dreaming, Miss Githa?' she said in quite a helpless tone; but I waited a little until her brain began to realise it, and then I saw her quick wits were piecing things together.

We had a long talk after this. I took Mardie into my confidence. I told her quite frankly that I was still ignorant of the reason that had led to my parents' separation, that whatever trouble had caused it was aggravated by misunderstanding and temperamental difficulty. 'My Aunt Cosie tells me,' I continued, 'that there was not sufficient cause for so serious an estrangement; but my mother is very proud, and, I think, a little hard, and she does not find a reconciliation easy. My dear father has a softer nature.'

I think I never loved nor respected Mardie as I did that night. No lady in the land could have shown such true delicacy and tact. She asked no questions beyond what I told her. It was none of hers or Hallett's business to meddle in their master's private affairs, she said. And then she assured me again

and again of her sympathy, and begged me not to lose hope in a brighter future.

'Even good people fall out sometimes, Miss Githa,' she went on, 'for does not the Bible tell us that matters were so sore between St. Paul and Barnabas, for all their friendship, that they parted and went different ways. And if, as you say, Mrs. Darnell is a proud lady, and stand-offish and fond of her own will, they may have thought it better to part for a time; and it must be your work, my darling dear young lady, to bring them together again.'

I had hinted at this to Mardie, and she had caught at the idea as though it were a rope to save drowning mariners, and in her homely womanly way gave me a good deal of encouragement.

She said so little that I do not know why I retained the strong impression that her sympathy was with my father; even when I told her of my mother's supreme act of self-sacrifice, she only shook her head with a heavy sigh. 'Those whom God has joined together,' I heard her whisper, and I knew then, as I knew afterwards, that the household would side with my father.

It was very late. An hour ago we had involuntarily hushed our voices as father went past my door, but Mardie positively refused to leave me. It would be useless for her to go to her bed, she said; she would only lie awake and worry. She would be far happier to sit beside me until I fell off into a peaceful sleep; and as nothing would move her, I took the full comfort of her silent companionship. I heard afterwards that it was not until the dawn that she crept away to her own room—dear, faithful Mardie.

There was one thing we settled before I slept that

night, that Mardie should choose her own time and opportunity for imparting the information of my mother's existence to Hallett and Mrs. Kennedy, 'our trusty council of Three,' as father often called them, but that for the present the rest of the household should be left in ignorance.

I knew well how faithfully and discreetly Mardie would guard our interests, that in spite of her friendly relations with Hallett she would be very sparing with her tongue.

One more duty remained to me. Miss Redford had become a trusted friend of the family, and I was unwilling to leave her in ignorance. When one has a difficult or painful task to perform, it is useless to procrastinate. No amount of contemplation or preparation beforehand is likely to make the softest dentist's chair a comfortable or luxurious seat, and a nauseous dose is swallowed more readily and with fewer grimaces if taken at once. Much as I cared for my dear Reddy—as I had grown to call her—since my emancipation from the schoolroom, I was always afraid of a certain cool, matter-of-fact criticism. Her sympathies lay deep, and were shown more in deeds than in words, though Reddy had her softer moods too.

When I told father the next morning that I intended calling at the Nutshell, as we always named it, he nodded rather gravely, as though he understood. But he did not suggest, as he generally did, that I should invite her—Miss Reddy—to come to dinner; we were neither of us inclined to be sociable, and preferred our cosy *tête-à-tête* in the evening.

Miss Redford was at home; she was sitting in the

tiny bay window, busily engaged in making a pelisse for Helen's bonnie boy. She seemed much surprised to see me, as she thought I was still at Bayfield; but she welcomed me most cordially, and exhibited her needlework rather proudly. 'Nellie declares that it is far fitter for a young marquis than for Elmer John Seymour,' she observed laughingly; and indeed the fairy garment was a marvel of fine needlework.

During the last year or two I had noticed a great alteration in Miss Redford. She looked older and more mature, and she had certainly lost flesh, though she seemed as strong and capable as ever. I had commented on this change to Aunt Cosie, but she only looked as though she agreed with me. 'Oh yes,' she observed, 'Claudia is certainly thinner; she is not the sort of woman to make flesh as she grows older. Helen was worrying over it the other day, but I told her that a prolonged course of platonic friendship was not exactly fattening,—oh yes,' with a little shrug of disapproval, 'I know she and Mr. Pelham consider themselves engaged, but as far as matrimony is concerned, it is likely to be a "No Thoroughfare" piece of business. I always thought Claudia a sensible, matter-of-fact woman; but even she has her limitations.'

I thought Miss Redford gave me a sharp look as she laid the needlework aside, and then we sat down and began to talk; but before I had said half-a-dozen words she almost took my breath away.

'I know what you are going to tell me, Githa,' she observed coolly, 'so there is no need for you to distress yourself in this manner. I am quite aware that your Cousin Yvonne is Mrs. Philip Darnell, and your mother.'

I could scarcely believe my ears when she said this. 'Who told you?' I asked faintly.

'My dear child, no one has told me. But I am very quick; my brother-in-law often says that I should make an excellent detective or lawyer. I have got a knack of finding out things, which Helen declares is almost uncanny.'

'But no one has said anything,' I returned; for though I had been relieved from a painful task I was not at all sure that I was grateful. Until now I had always admired Miss Redford's intellect and keen penetration, but I felt a little repelled by the idea that so strong a flashlight had been turned on our personal concerns. I think my manner hurt her a little.

'You must not judge me beforehand, Githa; let me explain matters more clearly. It is no fault of mine that I have a mathematical brain and a certain sagacity which enables me to form conclusions long before people begin to make up their minds. From the first I knew your father was not a widower. My dear old friend, Mrs. Bevan, never told me so in words, neither do I remember that I ever questioned her directly on the subject,—nevertheless her manner gave me the clue. I was sure that your mother was living, although you were unaware of the fact; but for a long time the whole thing was an enigma; for all I knew Mrs. Philip Darnell might be in an asylum.'

'Oh, Reddy, how could you think of anything so horrible?'

'My dear, imagination is a sad vagabond, and plays one sorry tricks sometimes, but I did not long cherish my hallucination. It was when you were ill, Githa, that the idea came in my head—one night when I was sitting

up with you—that your Cousin Yvonne and your mother were one and the same person.’

‘But why—why,’ I gasped, ‘why should such a notion come into your head?’

‘Ah, there we must ask our vagabond again. Why do these sudden intuitions and flashes of insight often come when one least expects them?’

‘From the first I felt there was a mystery about your Cousin Yvonne. The regularity of your visits to Bayfield and your cousin’s very evident kindness and generosity, the fact that she never came to St. Olave’s Lodge, and that though letters passed between them, that Mr. Darnell never visited at Prior’s Cot, were very perplexing. To a mathematical brain surely two and two ought to make four. It was easy to see that your cousin regarded you with almost maternal affection. You are very frank and artless, Githa, and you have told me so much; my dear, is it so wonderful that you yourself should have unconsciously given me the clue? That night when you were light-headed, and you begged your father to send for dear Cousin Yvonne, I saw him wince and change colour, and such a strange look come into his eyes, that I said to myself “That woman is Githa’s mother.”’

CHAPTER XXI

AN OBJECT LESSON

It does no good to brood over our troubles ; it does not help matters out a bit. Be on the look-out for bright rays, and you will certainly find them.—ANON.

Three blissful words I name to thee,
Three words of potent charm,
From eating care thy heart to free,
Thy life to shield from harm ;—
Pray—work—and sing.

J. STUART BLACKIE.

I LISTENED to Miss Redford's crisp, fluent sentences without any wish to interrupt her. There was no longer a difficult task before me, but yet how suddenly tired I felt. A coming sense of unreality assailed me. Could it really be true after all ? One knows so well in after life these sudden chill revulsions and throbs of heart-sickness. The overwrought brain is confused, doubtful. There is no clearness of vision,—something, we know not what, has blurred our sight all at once. I seemed to be assisting at a strange function more tragical than joyful. I was listening to some narrative which did not seem to concern me at all. I looked helplessly at Miss Redford ; surely she would know what to do next. Was it my fancy that a startled look came into her

eyes. She leant forward and took my hand very firmly in hers ; their warmth seemed comforting ; and as I tried to smile at her, she said, very gently and quietly,

‘That is right, Githa dear, pull yourself together, do not let yourself go. You have gone through a great deal since we last met, and you are exhausted.’ And then she told me to sit still while she went into the other room ; and a moment later she brought me a restorative. After a few minutes I was less confused, but for some time she refused to go on with our talk. She took up her needlework, and went on sewing, but all the time she was watching me. I grew impatient of the silence at last.

‘I am not so tired now,’ I observed ; ‘your dose was so potent that it has warmed me through and through.’

‘Yes, your colour has come back, but you were not really faint, only a little confused ; I understand all that so well.’ She spoke calmly, but there was a sort of sigh in her voice. ‘Githa, I was only trying to help you when I was saying all that. You looked so terribly distressed, my poor child, that I wanted to spare you.’

‘You were very good to me, Reddy.’

‘My dear, there is nothing that I would not do to help you. I can quite see that you are in a difficult position. For some cause your parents have decided to live apart ; that fact alone must point to complications.’

I silently acquiesced in this. Miss Redford intuitively knew or guessed so much that it was clearly inadvisable to tell her more, even if I were in a position to do so. She looked at me wistfully, hesitated, and then went on.

‘There is something I want to ask you, Githa, though I am half afraid to do so. I know you were

always very much attached to Mrs. Darnell, surely the knowledge that it is she who is your own mother and not some unknown stranger gives you a certain pleasure and relief.'

The question seemed a difficult one to me, and I hardly knew how to answer it. 'I have always loved my Cousin Yvonne,' I replied slowly. 'I have trusted and admired her all my life, but she seems to have grown suddenly strange to me.'

'That is because you are confused, my dear. You see you have scarcely recovered from the shock.'

'You may be right,' I returned, putting up my hands to my forehead in a bewildered fashion; but I feel sometimes as though it is too impossible to believe; it is like talking to one's dearest friend under a mask. It is not Cousin Yvonne, it is some one else.'

Miss Redford smiled and patted my hands. 'Yes, I know. You must be patient, and you will get more accustomed to the idea; when shall you see Mrs. Darnell again?'

'I return to Bayfield to-morrow.' She seemed surprised at this.

'Are you sure that is wise, that you are fit to go?' Then I knew that she was a little anxious about me.

'I promised,' was my reply.

'Ah, then, in that case I will not try to dissuade you. I suppose Mrs. Marland will go down with you?'

'We have not arranged that. I shall talk to father this evening; if he agrees I shall probably remain at Bayfield for ten days or a fortnight. I cannot stay away from him longer.'

She nodded, and regarded me thoughtfully, and I felt that she was reading me like an open book. 'Poor child,' she said softly; but she made no

objection when I told her that it was growing late and that I must go.

'And I must not come and see you to-morrow before you start,' and I shook my head.

'I think not, Reddy ; I shall have father. Somehow it seems to make things worse to talk about them, but I wanted you to know.' And then I would have bade her good-bye, but she told me to wait a moment and she would walk with me to St. Olave's Lodge. At the gate she kissed me most affectionately, and begged me to take things more simply and quietly. 'And remember if I can do anything to help you, Githa, I shall be only too thankful to be of service,' and I knew she meant every word she said. In spite of her abrupt manner and undemonstrative nature she was absolutely sincere and reliable. She would go through fire and water for those she loved, and take no credit to herself for her self-sacrifice.

I was glad that father would not be back until tea-time. I wanted a little quiet time to myself. After luncheon I went up to the corner room and sat down by the open window. In spite of the freshness of the air blowing off the river it was quite warm in the sunshine, and I scarcely needed the light wrap I wore. There had been a refreshing shower or two in the morning, and that 'clear shining after rain' gave an indescribable beauty to the scene. Such golden lights and soft shadows on the river, such wide spaces of blue sky just flecked by white, feathery clouds.

A thrush was singing his spring song in the acacia below, with delicious trills and breaks of fluting melody. 'All was well,' he chanted ; winter was over, and his nest was full. He was singing to his patient, bright-eyed mate, who was intent on family cares under the

green leaves. They were young, and the world was young too. There was sunshine, and worms were plentiful, and that was sufficient for bird philosophy.

Presently a little steam tug snorted noisily as it passed with a train of empty barges in tow. In the last one a boy lay asleep on a heap of sacks. A large white dog sat erect beside him, like a sentinel on guard.

Just beneath my window a man, wheeling a heavy truck of plants and flowers, had paused for a moment to recover his breath. He was a heavily built man, with a club foot, but he looked a cheerful creature. A mite of a child in a queer old sunbonnet was laughing at him out of a big basket in the midst of the plants. She was sucking a piece of sugar-stick with immense relish. Some smartly dressed children and their nurse stood for a moment to watch. One of the children carried a bag of buns, probably for the nursery tea later on. She was a fair, pretty little girl. I noticed she said something to her nurse, and then shyly offered a bun to the baby, who gave a shout of delight as she grabbed at it.

'Ook, Fardie, a cake for Bella,' I heard her say in her shrill little voice. The sunbonnet was pushed back excitedly. The grimy little hands were as full as the thrush's nest. Happy Bella. No little princess could have been more blissful than the coster's baby in the ragged basket; for her, too, the sun shone and the world was good. I was becoming interested. I wanted to keep sad thoughts at bay, to rest and distract myself, and so to gather strength for the evening. These little human comedies diverted me. Before the truck moved on there was another episode. A little woman in shabby black stood on the pavement looking at the plants.

She had some pence in her ungloved hand, and her covetous glance was fixed on a pot of large white daisies, tall, with golden discs, such as grow in country meadows under hedgerows. Mardie came to bring me a message just then, but she did not stay. When I looked out again the little woman was carrying the pot of daisies with an air of proud triumph. Clearly she had obtained a possession, and for her the sunshine had meaning.

Just then a well-known figure, a neighbour of ours, stumbled into sight, leaning heavily on the arms of a man-servant. Poor old Colonel Thorne, an octogenarian, who had outlived his wife and family, and who had just fought through a paralytic seizure, to the astonishment of his doctors and nurses. The old man with the scythe had been cheated of his prey, for a time, but the vigorous, gallant soldier was now a pitiable wreck. Weakness and senile decay were stamped on each loose, uncertain movement. Every afternoon at this hour, when the sun shone, he passed our house with his faithful attendant, now dragging his feet with difficulty along the sunny pavement, and now resting on a bench. His huddled-up figure and white hair streaming over his fur collar always moved me to pity. And yet surely for him there were compensations. His battles were all fought ; he had worked well ; had taken his losses like a man. His dear ones were already safe in the harbour, and his battered old hulk was only held by a light chain, until the Captain gave the orders to loose from the moorings.

I had always noticed that the dim, tired eyes turned involuntarily to the river ; nothing else seemed to interest him. Perhaps he unconsciously connected it with that last solemn river, which even his faltering

footsteps must pass, the waters of which should be his healing and renewal. So even for him there was the warm sunshine and the spring breezes, and the Father's smile, and perchance, before long, the 'Well done, faithful servant' to be spoken by the Master. My quiet rest-hour had done me good, and I was more ready to play my part in the evening.

I saw at once that father was not in good spirits. The shadow of our parting was over him. He never liked me to leave him, even for a day, though he rarely mentioned this fact. But I knew him too well to be deceived by any flimsy attempts at cheerfulness.

After tea he asked me to read him an article in a magazine which he thought would interest us both, and the dressing-bell sounded before I had quite finished it.

When dinner was over he followed me to the drawing-room. It was still too early in the season to sit outside on the balcony, but the window overlooking the river was a favourite evening resort.

I went to the piano and played as usual, until it was too dark to see the notes, and then father rung for lights; but when they had been brought he came to my side for a moment.

'I suppose you are going by the usual afternoon train to-morrow, Gipsy?'

I nodded assent.

'And Mrs. Marland will accompany you to Bayfield?'

'If you think that is still necessary, father.'

'Yes—yes,' with a touch of impatience. 'I do not care for my daughter to travel alone. You are too young and attractive, Gip; and now tell me when I may expect you back.'

'Could you spare me for a fortnight?' I faltered. 'I think—I really think—I ought to stay as long as that.'

His face clouded, but he made no objection. 'You are the best judge,' he said curtly. 'Now, and for the future, I shall expect you to decide this point for yourself.' His tone did not quite please me, but I let it pass, and played a few soft chords on the keys; but the next moment his hands were on my shoulder. 'Will my little girl always be loyal to me?' he whispered in my ears.

I drew back as though I had been stung. 'Father!' was all I could say; but he was instantly filled with remorse.

'Hush! don't look at me like that, darling. Indeed I did not mean it.' Then, as I leant back against him, he kissed me in a hurried, fond way. 'No—no; it is always Darnell and Co., Gipsy, always Darnell and Co.'

CHAPTER XXII

SYDNEY PROVES AN OPTIMIST

I follow, follow, sure to meet the sun,
And confident, that what the future yields
Will be the right, unless myself be wrong.

LONGFELLOW.

I WAS rather surprised and disappointed on reaching Bayfield the following afternoon not to see Sydney's bright face awaiting me on the platform, and I was just wondering what could have detained her when Sam Moyle, who acted as gardener and coachman at Prior's Cot, came up to me, smiling broadly, and, touching his hat, handed me a three-cornered note.

'It is from the missus,' he observed, 'but the mare is a bit fresh, and I must not leave her;' and then he went off. We all liked Sam. He was an honest, reliable fellow, and, as Cousin Yvonne, my mother, I mean, often remarked, with a sigh of intense satisfaction, that he was worth his weight in gold.

It was only a pencilled line from her telling me that Sydney had gone on the river with Rhona and Thurston Wilde; that she fully expected to be back in good time to meet my train, but that probably the tide had detained them. The signature, 'Your loving

mother,' made me flush so suddenly that I saw Mardie look at me rather curiously.

I explained matters to her and bade her good-bye, but she waited to see me drive off. I am afraid Sam found me rather a quiet companion that day. It was an effort to rouse myself and ask questions about his wife and family. There were five boys and one girl, and they were all blue-eyed and red-headed, mischievous, sturdy little urchins, who were their father's pride. He fairly chortled with joy as he narrated Bob's last prank and the saucy ways of Jemmy, who was the last baby but one, and a pickle from his cradle. I used to fear that Jane Moyle, who was a subdued, hard-worked little woman, found her unruly infants rather a trial. Even little Nancy was as great a hoyden as her brothers. Sam was just telling with great relish of the young pig that he and his missus had bought, and the fine stye that he had made for it, when we turned down the lane leading to Prior's Cot. As we drove in the gate I saw a hand waving from the window over the porch, but as I entered the house my mother was crossing the hall to meet me. Nothing could have been kinder than her greeting-kiss, and as she stood holding my hands there was a new look in her eyes, as though her mother love, so unnaturally starved and repressed, was compelled to find vent. It gave me a curious thrill as I recognised this.

'You had better have some tea before you go up to your room, Githa,' and then she led me into the bright, sunny drawing-room. And as I took my wonted seat beside the little tea-table, and the old dreamy feeling took possession of me again, was it my fancy that my mother looked thinner—yes, and a little

older? But how beautiful she was with the silvery masses of hair piled so lightly on her forehead, and those dark, melancholy eyes that looked into mine so lovingly.

'Your train was very punctual, my dear. Poor Sydney will be sadly disappointed at missing you. I believe they all meant to meet you, but the tide must have been against them. They took their luncheon with them,—it is such a lovely day. Rhona's aunt, Miss Etheridge, was with them.'

Miss Etheridge was a stranger to me, and I was not sorry to have missed the party. I did not say so, but I am sure my mother understood, for as she handed me a cup of tea she looked at me rather intently.

'You are not quite well yet, Githa,' she observed, and there was a new note of gentleness in her voice. 'I hoped your pretty colour would have come back,' touching my cheek with caressing fingers.

I was perilously near tears at this moment, she was so dear and loving. Why was I so slow to respond?

'I am only a little tired,' I stammered. Then she sighed, but let the excuse pass.

'How long shall you be able to remain with me?' was her next question, but my answer did not seem to fully satisfy her.

'Only a fortnight'—then she checked herself, and her manner stiffened for a moment.

'I have no intention of being exacting, Githa,' she went on. 'You are of an age now to make your own arrangements. It is natural that I should wish to have you with me as much as possible, but I realise the difficulty.' Then she sighed again and changed the subject a little abruptly by telling me that Sydney was going up to town the following Tuesday to stay with

the Etheridges for a few weeks. Mrs. Etheridge was less well than usual and wished to consult her London doctor; an old friend had lent them a house for a month, and they had invited Sydney to accompany them. 'Miss Etheridge—Aunt Laura as they call her—will be there too,' continued my mother. 'She is an active, sociable person, and will take the girls about to concerts and theatres; it will really be a great treat to Sydney, only she is so sorry to miss so much of your visit.'

I was sorry too, and yet, perhaps, under the circumstances a third person would be embarrassing; it would be easier to find opportunities for opening my heart to my mother when we were alone. 'We shall both miss her I am afraid,' I returned; and as far as I was concerned it was certainly the truth, but my mother shook her head.

'No, I am glad for her to go for several reasons. I shall like to have you to myself for a little, Githa; dear Sydney, sweet and good as she is, would be rather *de trop* just now.' She paused a moment as though she hoped for some response on my part, but I only listened silently, and she went on: 'And there are other reasons why I shall be thankful to get her away from Bayfield for a few weeks. I begin to think that you were right, and that Thurston is paying her far too much attention—there is no keeping them apart. He and his dogs are always hanging about the lane; she can go nowhere that he does not waylay or follow her. If this went on I should be obliged to speak to Sydney, but I am unwilling to do that.'

'It would be better,' I said, 'to speak to Thurston'; but my mother did not seem willing to do this at present. Thurston had a quick temper, she remarked,

and would readily take offence ; his will was strong, and if he were really in love with Sydney, opposition would only fan the flame ; the little break would be good for both, and when Sydney came back to Bayfield she would keep a stricter watch over the girl, and, if necessary, give her a hint.

‘I suppose Thurston will see them in town,’ I suggested.

‘Oh yes, there can be no doubt of that, for he told me that Colonel Etheridge had given him a general invitation ; but he will hardly venture to pay Sydney attention—there are too many chaperones, and he will certainly not see her alone. To add to the complication, I am afraid poor little Rhona is beginning to care for him. I was at the Mount yesterday and Thurston came in with a message from his grandmother, and Rhona flushed up so when she saw him—she really looked quite pretty for the moment—but Thurston hardly noticed her.’

I think all this talk was just a ruse on my mother’s part to put me at my ease ; it was evident that my looks did not satisfy her—things had gone more deeply with me than she had supposed. She had cheated herself with the idea that I was too young to suffer—that I should placidly adapt myself to the situation ; but she found my reserve and nervousness a little baffling.

She took me up to my room after that. The toilet table was decked with the loveliest spring flowers, and I knew that she, and not Sydney, had gathered and arranged them. When I thanked her she only looked at me with a wistful smile.

‘I scarcely slept all night for pleasure at the thought that you would be lying here to-night’ ; and her hand touched the pillow. ‘How I have longed for you,

darling, night and day, night and day'; and then with a sudden break in her voice: 'Be good to me, dear child, and let me see you more like your old self during the short time we are together.' But before I could answer her she had left the room.

There was a lump in my throat as I began to dress myself, and my eyes were hot and smarting with repressed tears. My mother's tenderness only added to my pain. I felt as though I were being torn asunder between these two. 'Surely,' I said to myself, 'if my mother needs me so much, she will not refuse to listen to me; for my sake she will be more ready to yield.' And then in the sweet evening light I knelt down with the brief prayer that when the right time came I might have courage and strength to speak, and that her love for her child might teach her to forgive; and after that I felt a little less troubled.

I even repeated to myself a few lines by Sutton that I had committed to heart that very morning. They had taken my fancy, and I had stored them, as a bee stores honey, for future use; they were strangely applicable now:

Who uses prayer, a friend shall never miss;
If he should slip, a timely staff and kind
Placed in his grasp by hands unseen shall find;
Sometimes upon his forehead a soft kiss,
And arms cast round him gently from behind.

It was at this moment that there was a light tap at the door, and Sydney's clear voice demanding admission; and the next moment she was hugging me as though we had been parted for years and not days. She looked flushed, excited, and rather perturbed, and she was panting with the haste she had made.

'Oh, Githa, I never was more sorry about anything. We all meant to meet you and bring you home in the wagonette, but it was Thurston's fault. He would not allow sufficient time for the return journey, and the tide was against us, and we were nearly an hour late; and the wagonette was wanted for Colonel Etheridge; and we had to walk home all that way. Rhona and I would not have minded, but Aunt Laura was so cross—she is not a good-tempered person, though nice in her way—and Thurston was annoyed, so I can't say I enjoyed my walk.'

'You look very hot and tired, Sydney.'

'Oh, that was just the worry of missing the train. But Aunt Yvonne told me that there was no time to chatter, and that we must wait until dinner.' And then Sydney hugged me again, and I knew by the way she looked at me that she was dying for a talk.

The opportunity soon came. It was a lovely evening, and the air felt as though it were June, and the moon was rising. Sydney, who seemed exhilarated rather than tired by her river excursion, begged us both to come out in the garden; but my mother refused.

'Githa will go with you,' she observed. 'There is a letter that I really must finish; but you must not keep her out too long, as she has had a journey.'

'Oh no, I will take care of her,' rejoined Sydney, tucking my arm under hers. 'The air is just delicious this evening—like snow and honey and a dash of cream—a regular syllabub of good things,' laughing and hurrying me away.

All through dinner she and I had discussed the London visit, and my mother had listened to us silently, only putting in a word now and then. It was a safe subject, and Sydney had a good deal to tell

me about her own and Rhona's plans. There were visits to the dentist, as well as theatres and concerts. 'Colonel Etheridge means to take us to the Royal Academy, and to the Tate Gallery, and the National Gallery as well. He is perfectly devoted to pictures. He has found out that Rhona has never been to the National Gallery, and he was quite shocked about it. He told her that he should take her art education in hand, but I don't believe that Rhona cares much about pictures; and, oh, Githa, we are both to have riding lessons in town, and Aunt Yvonne is giving me a habit.'

We all knew why Sydney was talking so eagerly about her promised treat. I am sure she felt the air a little electric, and was afraid of an embarrassing silence, and I seconded her to the best of my ability.

Sydney's manner quite changed directly we found ourselves outside.

'Let us go down the lane,' she said, in a low voice. 'No one will ever hear us there, and the moonlight on the meadow is so lovely'; and as I agreed to this she gave my arm a little squeeze.

'It will be such a comfort to talk to you quietly, Githa dear; it really seems weeks since Monday. Aunt Yvonne told me that night, and I was so excited and happy that I could not sleep for hours.'

I felt a little surprised to hear her say this. I knew that Sydney had a beautiful nature, but I never thought that she was so absolutely free from all taint of jealousy or selfishness. In her place as Cousin Yvonne's adopted daughter, the unexpected arrival of a real daughter would have made me feel out in the cold; but Sydney had none of this shivery self-consciousness.

'How could I help being happy,' she returned a

little reproachfully, 'that you should have such a dear, wonderful mother? Of course, as I told Aunt Yvonne, it seems a little strange at first, and that we should have to get used to the situation; but that did not make it any the less joyful. Oh, how touching and sweet Aunt Yvonne was that night! I could not help crying as I listened to her. I think no mother ever loved her child as she loves you.'

'If she had loved me a little more she would hardly have left me.' Then Sydney stood still in the moonlight, and I saw that her face was rather grave.

'I do not like to hear you say that, Githa dear; but I am sure that you do not really mean it. Don't you see what a grand and noble thing it was?—to sacrifice herself for her husband; it almost broke her heart to do it.'

'Yes—and I ought not to have spoken as I did. You must forget it, for dearly as I love my new mother I am not at all happy. How am I to do my duty to my parents? They both want me; but I think—nay, I am sure—that my father needs me most. Sydney, you look at everything in such a bright, hopeful way, that you do not see all the complications.'

'I am afraid you are right,' in a low voice. 'But I think I do understand the difficulty, only I believe it will be solved somehow. Aunt Yvonne only told me as much as she thought necessary. There was trouble, and she and Mr. Darnell had decided to live apart. You were left to your father's care on condition that you were not informed of your mother's identity until you were of an age to judge for yourself. Perhaps it is a little perplexing for us to understand; but I am quite sure of one thing—that when Aunt Yvonne took this singular step she thought she was doing the right thing.'

I let this pass, for I found it almost impossible to answer such speeches truthfully. Could it be that I had inherited my mother's nature after all? I could forgive—oh yes, thank God, I could forgive—but I could not understand. I had an innate conviction that my mother's complex personality would present obstacles that I might not easily surmount. Surely with a little more patience, a little more love, all this suffering and misery might have been averted. This was Aunt Cosie's opinion, and I felt that I agreed with her.

Sydney went on talking in her sweet way. She was overflowing with affection and sympathy, and said so many nice things about my mother, that I felt deeply grateful.

'Have I comforted you a little, Githa dearest?' she asked wistfully. 'Will you try and think more hopefully about the future?'

'I will try my best,' I returned. 'I am afraid I am disappointing you because I am not happier, but you must not misunderstand me. I am very grateful for the new blessing vouchsafed to me, but I am weighed down with a sense of responsibility. Oh, Sydney! if I could only bring about a reconciliation between those two dear people.'

'And what then, dearest?'

'Ah, then, young as I am, I feel as though I could use old Simeon's prayer, and that the Angel of Forgiveness and I would smile at each other through the ages.'

I am afraid Sydney thought I was talking a little wildly—for how could she know what I meant? But she was full of tender concern when I suddenly burst into tears, for I was still weak and overwrought; but the relief did me good. No, I shall never forget how gentle and dear she was that night.

CHAPTER XXIII

GOLLIWOG AND LOT'S WIFE

You ask for the effect to follow cause
Too soon and visibly. 'Twere well to wait,
The pears upon my trees are still but green,
But they will ripen in the summer sun.
Our vanity would do all things at once ;
God takes His time and puts us all to shame.

AARON WATSON.

WE had stayed out so long that my mother came in search of us. She wore a grey silk gown that evening, and as she walked down the lane towards us in the clear white moonlight, with a fleecy wrap thrown over her head, she looked like some fair, stately wraith—more like a vision than a living woman.

'Sydney, is this wise? Githa is tired from her journey and is not as strong as usual.' She spoke gently, but there was implied reproach in her voice.

'Oh, I am so sorry, Aunt Yvonne,' returned Sydney penitently. 'It was so lovely in the lane, and we were talking and forgot all about the time.'

'That is exactly what I imagined. Do you know, children, that it is past nine o'clock?'

I do not know whether my mother noticed that I had been shedding tears ; but she put her arm round

me, and we all walked back a little silently, and I was not sorry when she begged me to go up to my room.

'I will say good-night to you when I come upstairs,' she observed. 'I hope I shall find you in bed by then.' But though she kept her word, I was relieved to see that she did not mean to stay and talk to me. She only asked me if I were comfortable, and hoped that I should sleep well; and then as she stooped to kiss me she whispered, 'God be with you, darling,' and left me alone in the moonlight.

I was so spent and weary that I soon fell asleep; and I remember that something she had said to me that afternoon was my last waking thought: 'How I have wanted you night and day—night and day.'

'That is how mothers feel,' I said to myself drowsily; 'mothers—and fathers too'; and then I sank into a heavy slumber.

When I woke the next morning I was glad to remember that it was Sunday. From a child I had always loved Sundays at Bayfield. There was something so peaceful in the Sabbath stillness that seemed to brood over the village; the children, with freshly washed faces and clean frocks, tripping by in twos and threes to the Sunday School; the little group of village lads loitering on the green until the church bell had stopped; the dropping of curtseys from the old women in the porch when the ladies from Prior's Cot made their appearance,—and then the hearty, simple service. Yes, even our dear old Chelsea church, where we went morning and evening, did not appeal to me so strongly.

'It always seems so much more like Sunday in the country,' I once said to father; and, as usual, he understood and agreed with me.

'I know what you mean, Gip. I have often felt the same.'

We were walking along the Embankment when he said this ; and then we stopped, as a pleasure steamer, full of people, passed us. A band was playing, and some children were dancing on the deck. Some smartly dressed girls, arm-in-arm with their sweethearts, were strolling towards Battersea Park ; rough lads were lounging on the benches and making remarks on the passers-by ; now and then a carriage, full of gaily-attired women, rolled by ; church bells were ringing, but they fell on deaf ears. Then, and often, my thoughts had turned longingly to the Sunday at Bayfield.

During the week I had often thought of Mr. Carlyon's kindness to me during the journey home. I felt grateful to him for his silent sympathy. He had said little, but his manner had implied so much. Nothing could have exceeded the delicacy of his tact and his wish to help me, and I told myself more than once that he would be a friend for adversity.

I longed, yet I dreaded to see him again, for I knew the sight of him would bring back the remembrance of the old bewildered pain, and I was glad that I should see him first in church. Sydney wanted me to go with her to the Sunday School, but I made some excuse, and remained quietly in my room trying to read until it was time to dress for church.

I found the service very soothing. I fancied that Mr. Carlyon glanced at our pew as he entered ; his sermon was beautiful and exceedingly helpful, only it was far too short. In the evening a stranger preached, and I am afraid my attention wandered a good deal.

I had found it very difficult to keep thought at bay ;

the remembrance of my last Sunday evening and the momentous talk with my mother came back with disturbing force. I felt sure by her manner, and a certain pained, drawn look in her face, that my mother shared this feeling. Throughout the day she had talked only of passing things—a book she had been reading, and which she thought would interest me; and she made me come round the garden with her in the afternoon to show me some improvements she had planned. 'I like to have your opinion about things, Githa,' she said in the old, kind way; and though I knew little about such matters, I praised eagerly everything that she pointed out—so great was my desire to please her. I remember once when she was showing me the new carnation-bed, that I called her Cousin Yvonne by mistake, and that I flushed so hotly that my face quite burnt; but she only put out her hand to me, with rather a sad smile.

'I forgot,' I said, feeling ashamed of my awkwardness; 'please forgive me, mother.'

'My dear, there is nothing to forgive—a trifling mistake like that is only natural'; and then she went on talking about a projected flower-border. She wanted to put me thoroughly at my ease—to make me feel more at home in my new rôle of daughter. Perhaps for the first time she realised my difficulty; it was no new idea to her all these years. I had been her child, the hidden treasure of her heart, on whom she had watched from afar with mute mother-love—for her there were no fresh developments or complications. She had only to open her arms and say to me, 'Githa, I am your mother'; that was all.

But for me it was different, and I was sure from her manner that afternoon that she had made up her mind

to be patient with me, and to win the confidence of my young heart by only the gentlest means, and, above all things, not to let me know how my new reserve pained her. Dear mother, it grieves me even now to think how I must have disappointed her! After supper that night mother played on the organ as usual, and Sydney and I sat together in the window seat. It was not quite dark, and the moon was rising, but the organ lamps had been lighted. The radiance streamed full on my mother's face—on the pale, perfect profile—the beautiful hands, with their glittering rings, moving so rapidly over the keys—and this fair, queenly woman was my mother! A sudden thrill of pride of possession seemed to pass through me. I felt at that moment a strange yearning to kneel down by her and take her hands, 'Mother, come home with me; we both need you so much'; and so overpowering was the impulse to say those words, that but for Sydney's presence I must have yielded to it.

The next morning I found plenty of occupation in writing to father and helping Sydney to pack. She talked in her cheerful fashion all the time, and hindered me a good deal; but she wanted to explain to me clearly how sorry she was to leave me, and at the same time she did not attempt to disguise her pleasurable anticipations. 'I am getting very fond of Rhona,' she went on; 'she rather grows on one. She is really very unselfish, and has such a sweet temper, and she has far more in her than you would ever guess.'

'Take care, Sydney,' I returned warningly, as I folded her new evening dress. 'Rhona may be all very well, but I won't have you liking her best.'

'There is no fear of that,' with a merry laugh. 'By-the-bye, Githa, if you only stay here a fortnight we

shall be able to meet in town'; and then we two fell to making plans.

When Colonel Etheridge took them to the Tate Gallery, they must all have luncheon at St. Olave's Lodge, and she and Rhona must come for a long day. 'I would rather have you by yourself, Syd,' I continued frankly; 'but we must not be unkind to poor Rhona, and we must have riding expeditions together.' But the rest of our plans awaited development, for at that moment my mother came in to see how we were getting on, and to remind us that it was nearly luncheon-time.

Sydney wanted to say good-bye to the twins, and urged me to accompany her to the Vicarage. She seemed rather surprised when I hesitated. 'We shall see no one but the children,' she continued; 'for even Peace is away to-day, and Thurston told me yesterday that he and the vicar were going to Henley this afternoon'; and after this I made no further demur.

We found the twins playing in the garden. There was a curious assemblage on the lawn—all Stella's dolls had been brought out for an airing, and sat in a row on the grass, headed by Cyril's special fetish, a huge Golliwog. This creature was the object of his tenderest devotion; he refused to go to sleep unless the black head reposed on the pillow beside him. 'Dear Duckems,' as he termed it, 'wanted to be cuddled.' When Peace objected to this arrangement, Stella took his part.

'Of course Cyril wanted his little black boy to be happy—poor, dear Golly, it had no nice father or mother to love him.' And as Stella ruled the nursery, the limp figure of the orphaned Golliwog soon occupied its accustomed place. Cyril was employed at the present moment in loading a small red cart with stones

with which he proposed to mend the road, as he called it—a narrow, uneven path leading to a small fernery. Both the children hailed us joyfully, and Stella took a flying leap into my arms.

'Why, it is our own dear Girlie comed back,' she shouted; and Cyril, echoing placidly, 'Girlie comed back,' hung affectionately on my dress. Their joy over me was so touching, and they kissed and loved me in such an engaging way, that I was obliged to sit down on the grass and hug them both. Sydney regarded us from the background with amused eyes. I had to remind Stella that she was performing the part of hostess rather imperfectly; she only shrugged a plump shoulder, and turned a trifle pettishly. 'Oh, Herberts is always here; we are used to her, aren't we, Cyril?' and Cyril nodding gravely, and muttering *sotto voce*, 'Erberts always here,' went off to his road-mending.

'I shall not be here to-morrow,' observed Sydney plaintively. 'I am going away for a whole month, Stella; that is four weeks—thirty-one days.'

Stella tossed back her curly mane, and regarded her old friend from under her long eyelashes in quite an irresistible way; but she was in one of her wilful moods. If Stella lived to grow up, she was likely to break a good many hearts; from her birth she had been a baby flirt, and before she could walk she had dispensed her favours with the air of a princess.

For some occult reason 'her dear Herberts' was not in her good graces. Stella only looked bored.

'A month isn't long,' she remarked carelessly. 'Come and see my children, Girlie dear. Cyril told Golliwog to mind them; doesn't he look beautiful in his new red tie? Boy says he is a regular Masher; didn't he, Cyril?'

'Paul said he was regularly mashed,' observed Cyril thoughtfully; then his manner changed as he caught sight of an unusually large stone.

'I have got a milestone, Stella,' he exclaimed joyfully; 'such a great, big, white, lovely stone'; but Stella eyed it with scant interest.

'I don't care much for milestones; don't interrupt, Cyril. I want Girlie to be introduced to the family'; and Cyril, who seemed to have no will of his own, sat down on the gravel and, with a red face, tugged at his milestone.

The introductions took a long time. Stella was a little exacting in her demands. The limp kid or waxen hands were all to be shaken, and a kiss imprinted on each rosy cheek. Stella would not let me off one. I began to wish the family was smaller. There were sixteen dolls of all sizes, and I had to hear the name and history of every one. Stella wished me to kiss the Golliwog too, but I avoided the situation by saying that I never kissed any gentleman but father; and I spoke so gravely and seemed so shocked at the idea that even Stella seemed surprised. We played kiss-in-the-ring after this, but it was such a very small ring that there were many kisses and short runs; and then Cyril, who had seemed rather absent in his mind, slipped his grimy little hand in mine and begged me to help him set up his milestone. Stella, who never liked to be out of anything, accompanied us.

'Isn't it a great, big, lovely stone,' he chuckled, 'and won't the road look grand?' But Stella's face wore a judicial air.

'The road is all holes, and the poor dear ants do look so unhappy, and the stone is far too big, Cyril.' She put her head on one side reflectively. 'Oh, I

have got such a ducky idea—it will make such a splendid Lot's wife turned into a pillar of salt; that is ever so much nicer than milestones. Do set it up, Cyril, and we will bring Boy, and ask him to preach a sermon about it.'

But for once Cyril looked unhappy.

'Must I, Stella—really and truly!'

'Of course you must, and Herberts will help you,' was Stella's peremptory response.

Then Cyril slowly and reluctantly set up the monument. As he did so we heard him murmur under his breath, in rather a distressed way: 'Poor Lot's wife—turned—into—pillar—of—salt—woman—want to love her, and be kind to her'; and the dear little fellow looked ready to cry. I was glad when Sydney coaxed him away from the damp path and its distressing memories, and proposed Hide-and-Seek and Puss-in-the-Corner.

CHAPTER XXIV

'GITHA, YOU FORGET YOURSELF'

How easy is the thought in certain moods of the loveliest, most unselfish devotion! How hard is the doing of the thought in the face of a thousand difficulties!—G. MACDONALD.

God called the nearest angels who dwell with Him above ;
The tender one was Pity, and the dearest one was Love.
WHITTIER.

I DROVE to the station with Sydney the next morning, and on our way we passed Thurston and his dogs; he was walking very fast, as though he were in a desperate hurry, and the dogs were barking and racing each other from the sheer joy of exercise. I saw a conscious flush on Sydney's face as she smiled and waved her hand.

'I said good-bye to him yesterday,' she observed carelessly. 'I suppose he has some business in the town'; but she did not look at me as she said this, and I was sure from her manner that she was fully aware of the business that brought him to Great Bayfield. In a surprisingly short time, considering the distance, he joined us on the platform. He had some flowers in his hand, which he gave to Sydney, to refresh her on

the journey. He said it laughingly, for of course it was an absurdly short journey. Sydney would be at Belmont House and would probably have unpacked before luncheon; but Thurston had cut the choicest blossoms in the hothouse, and had arranged quite an exquisite little bouquet. For once in her life Sydney looked excessively nervous; she kept her eyes fixed on the flowers, and seemed scarcely able to look at either of us. I am sure it was quite a relief to her when the train started.

I could not help watching Thurston. I thought he had never looked to such advantage; it was impossible to deny that he was a most strikingly handsome young man. The strain of Spanish blood in his veins was apparent in his pale olive complexion and dark hair and eyes. When his face was in repose there was rather a proud expression about the mouth; the short upper lip curled a little disdainfully under the black moustache; but his smile was particularly pleasant and winning, his temperament was ardent, and he would know how to play the rôle of a lover better than most men.

I was not surprised to hear him tell Sydney that he would probably be in town the following week, and should certainly call at Belmont House; but I am sure Sydney looked a little frightened when he said this.

Thurston did not ask me to drive him back, as I expected; he said he had a note for the mill half a mile farther, and that he and the dogs needed exercise. They were certainly unusually frolicsome; I saw them leaping on him as he left the station, as though they were a pack of puppies.

I thought my mother looked a little vexed when I

narrated this episode. 'Foolish fellow,' she said impatiently, 'he is just stirring up a hornet's nest, and no good will come of it.'

The next three or four days passed very quietly and pleasantly; if there were hidden undercurrents the surface was smooth and unruffled.

Every morning, while my mother discharged her housekeeping tasks, I wrote to father. I had little news to tell him, but I knew how he loved to see a letter in my handwriting lying beside his plate when he came down to breakfast. When my mother came into the room she never took any notice of my employment.

'When you have finished, Githa, we will go into the village; but there is no hurry, we have the day before us,' she would invent some such speech as that.

My mother had not recovered her normal strength, and could not walk far; but we potted about the cottages, and looked in at the school, and killed time very agreeably. We generally took a long drive in the afternoon, coming back to a late tea; but, with the exception of St. Helen's Towers, we paid no visits. I thought Lady Wilde was not quite as cordial in her manner to either of us; but I did not venture to question my mother, even when she said very kindly that she feared I had not enjoyed my visit—a fact which I could not deny. I was afraid to continue the subject, and I could not be sure that the truth had not leaked out. Lady Wilde was not a sympathetic person; she disliked secrets and mysteries, and was rather intolerant and critical on matters she did not fully understand.

In the evening we generally had music, or my mother read to me. She had a beautiful voice, which

much enhanced the interest of the story. She had a great partiality for poetry, especially sacred poetry, and it was she who taught me to love *The Christian Year* all my life long. I shall never forget the exquisite timbre and sadness of her voice when she once repeated from memory those lines—

Why should we faint and fear to live alone,
Since all alone, so Heaven has willed, we die?
Not even the tenderest heart, and next our own,
Knows half the reasons why we smile and sigh.

Young as I was, it brought the tears to my eyes. I was quite content to sit at my fancy work and listen. I am sure no outsider watching us could have detected anything to mar the perfect harmony and peace of the scene; and yet at times, when we had been silent for a few minutes, I had raised my eyes from my work and found my mother's gaze fixed on me with a grave intensity that bordered on sadness. Those glances, so penetrating and yearning, always brought back the old ache. Clearly she was not satisfied or happy about me; and yet was it all my fault?

To my regret, I had not yet seen Mr. Carlyon. He had called one afternoon when we were driving, and had not repeated his visit. I do not know if it were my fancy that my mother seemed rather relieved that we had missed him; at least, her manner gave me this impression; and yet I knew how much she thought of him.

One evening, when I had been playing as usual, my mother asked me to sing to her. I hesitated for a moment, and she repeated her request. My voice was not as clear as usual, and I felt it was not under my control. I became a little nervous, and broke off

presently, saying that I was out of practice, and that I was acquitting myself too badly to give her any pleasure. She accepted my excuses rather gravely, and I closed the piano, and came to the table to take up my work ; but she checked me.

'I am not going to read to-night, Githa ; like you, I am not in the mood.' Her manner made me vaguely uneasy.

'I am sorry ! but indeed I could not sing to-night, mother,' I said hastily ; 'I really have neglected practising lately.'

'That is a pity,' she returned a little dryly ; 'it is not right to let yourself go like this, Githa.' I felt rather hurt by this remark ; surely she must know why I could not sing. But the next moment her manner softened.

'We are both a little out of gear to-night,' she observed kindly ; 'supposing we talk instead.'

'Do you mean I am not to work ?'

'Yes, we will both be idle for an hour, Githa, my dear. You have been here nearly a week, half your visit is over, and yet we have said little to each other.'

It was the truth, though I quaked nervously to hear her say it.

'And yet we have talked a good deal,' was my somewhat lame rejoinder.

'Oh yes, we have talked. It is easy to skim over the surface in an easy, birdlike fashion, but one should go deeper than that. Githa, I have watched you closely these five or six days, and it has struck me more than once that Cousin Yvonne came closer to you than your mother.'

'No, no ; how can you say such things !'

'But if it be the truth, my dear, would it not be

wiser to face it.' She looked at me with wistful tenderness, and there was a faint trembling about her beautiful mouth and chin, always with her a mark of intense agitation. 'Darling, I wish you would tell me in what way my love has been remiss—have I not been good to you?'

'Indeed, indeed, you have,' I returned with emotion. 'No mother could have been kinder.'

'And yet you cannot reconcile yourself to the fact of our relationship. You could love Cousin Yvonne and open your heart to her freely; there was little or nothing that you kept back from her; and you are reserved and retiring with her now you know she is your mother.'

I could not answer her, it was all so absolutely true.

'Is this right or reasonable?' she went on. 'I have not changed, nothing is really changed; as your father and I were relations, it is still the truth that I am your Cousin Yvonne. But I am your mother as well, who nearly died in giving you life, and watched over your infancy with such love that no other mother could surpass!'

Oh, the wonderful passion of her voice as she said this; it thrilled me through and through! If I could only make her understand what I really felt—the yearning pity, the affection, the sense of utter helplessness.

'Indeed, I love you, mother,' I faltered. 'If you could only read my heart, and know how I long to be all you desire, and to make your life happier! But I am so young to have such a burden laid on me. If it were only you, but there is father,' and tears rushed to my eyes at the mention of that beloved name.

I saw a pained expression cross her face ; the hand she laid on mine was rather cold.

'Do you think I forget—that I do not realise all the difficulty, Githa? Heaven forbid that I should be exacting, or make unreasonable demands on your young life. You are no longer a child, you are of an age to judge ; give me as much or as little of your time as you think best. I am used to loneliness, only for pity's sake do not shut me out of your confidence.'

I could have sobbed aloud at the tenderness of her voice ; proud as she was, she could stoop to humbly entreat her child's love.

'Try to be patient with me,' I pleaded. 'I want to be all that a daughter should be, but just now I feel confused and sad.'

'Why sad, my darling?'

'Because I cannot do my duty to you both ; because one or other of the two dearest to me on earth must be lonely and wanting me, and the knowledge gives me pain.'

'Poor child—yes, I see—your nature is sensitive, and you feel things more keenly than I guessed ; but it was right for you to know, Githa.'

I assented so vehemently to this that rather a bitter smile came to her lips.

'That means that you blame me for letting you grow up in ignorance.'

'No, do not say that ; it is not for me to blame my mother ; doubtless you had your reasons ; but it was a mistake. I shall always feel that ; it has certainly added to the difficulty.'

Her gravity grew deeper, but she evidently did not resent my frankness. She had asked for my con-

fidence, and she must not shrink from any chance wound.

‘In that case it is clearly my duty to help you,’ she returned quietly. ‘I see your position, Githa: you cannot content one parent without leaving the other sore and dissatisfied. Well, that is no fault of yours. Let me try to solve the difficulty. You and your father are everything to each other; from a mere infant you loved him best. Do you think I do not recognise the fact—that I have not faced it all these years? Go on as you have been doing, let him have the lion’s share of your time and affection; you are the mistress of his house, and you must not neglect your duties. I will be content—yes, I mean it, Githa—with such fragments as you can spare me.’

‘You cannot really mean that, mother.’

‘But I do, my dear; have I not said more than once that I am used to loneliness? If I were ill or dying I know you would come to me. Let it be as I say, and try and be at peace, my child. There shall be no specified conditions, you shall be free as air. When you come your mother will welcome you gladly; when you stay away there shall be no word of reproach to harm you.’ How generous she was; certainly at that moment I loved her well. ‘Will this content you, Githa?’ putting her hand on my shoulder with a brave smile. Then again an overpowering impulse seized me; whatever came of it I must speak.

‘No,’ I returned, and my voice sounded a little strange to me. ‘Am I made of stone, that anything so unnatural could satisfy me? Mother, dearest mother, father and I both love you—we both want you—come home.’

'Githa!' I am sure for the moment that she did not believe her ears.

'Come home,' I repeated earnestly; 'your place is ready, it has been ready all these years. Oh, mother, listen: father wants you, and he and I will make you so happy'; but she freed herself from my grasp, and drew herself up to her full height. She had grown white to her very lips, but there was no yielding in her voice.

'Githa, you forget yourself,' she said quietly, and then, without looking at me, left the room.

CHAPTER XXV

'GO ON WITH YOUR MISSION'

Argue not
Against Heaven's hand, or will, nor bate a jot
Of heart or hope ; but still bear up and steer right onward.

MILTON.

On bravely through the sunshine and the showers,
Time hath his work to do, and we have ours.

EMERSON.

A FEELING akin to despair took possession of me as the door closed behind my mother, a sense of humiliation which was hard to bear.

I had done no good, rather the reverse, by my earnest appeal. I had been silenced, and put into my right place—rebuked for my officiousness—told in plain terms that I had meddled with business which I did not understand. All this had been conveyed to me in those four words, 'Githa, you forget yourself.'

My mother's inflexible will had sealed my lips. I had hurt, angered her. Instead of being drawn nearer, I felt that the distance had widened between us.

It is impossible to describe the bitterness of my disappointment, the utter blankness that seemed to engulf me—this was how I had commenced my mission of reconciliation. Then as I remembered my

dream, and the fair vision of the Angel of Forgiveness, my tears fell faster and faster. I was so young; even now when I think of that hour I am filled with pity for that weeping girl, suddenly brought face to face with the stern realities of life.

It was as though a blank wall suddenly closed my path, and I could take no step forward without hurt or damage. 'I may as well give it up,' I said to myself, 'and try and make up to father for all he has to bear.' My mother's stern rebuff had so repelled and unnerved me that I turned to him with a new yearning—my father, who had never spoken a harsh or severe word to me in my life; how could I be sad and lonely as long as I had him! I do not know how the next hour passed. My tears had ceased, but I was still sitting brooding heavily over my trouble, when my mother re-entered the room. She was still very pale, but she had evidently been making a great effort to regain her composure.

'It is very late, Githa,' she said quietly. 'Jane is coming in directly to shut up and extinguish the lamps; you had better go to bed.' Then as she saw my face more clearly, she came across the room to me and put her hand on my shoulder. 'I am not angry,' she said very gently; 'it grieves me to see that you have been fretting—it was a mistake, but you meant it for the best'; and then she kissed me with more than her wonted affection, but I fear, I greatly fear, that I did not respond.

I did not sleep for hours—I could not rid myself of a vague expectation that she would come to me in the darkness, but she never came; and though I fevered myself with listening for her step, I could hear no movement—perhaps she too kept midnight vigil!

When I entered the breakfast-room the next morning mother gave me a scrutinising look, but she made no remark ; only, when we had finished our meal she observed that she was likely to be engaged for an hour or two. 'I should advise you to take a walk, Githa,' she went on, 'there is nothing like air for a headache.' I had not told her that my head ached, but I suppose she drew her own conclusions.

As the idea of letter-writing was abhorrent to me, I acted on this advice. I was in that unhappy mood when one is only fit for one's own society—any casual talk would have jarred on me. I had slept badly and felt unusually weary, and after a slow stroll I sat down on a little bench that had been placed on the grassy border of the road, and tried to pull myself together and get my thoughts into order. It was a quiet, secluded road, and there were few passers-by to disturb me—a boy leading a kid, and two little girls carrying a basket between them, a waggoner walking beside his gaily caparisoned team carrying sacks of flour from the mill.

By-and-by a tall figure that I seemed to recognise came across the meadow, and vaulted over the stile with the ease of a practised athlete. I was a little troubled to see it was Mr. Carlyon. As the stile was just opposite the bench, it was impossible for him to pass without seeing me—indeed, I was sure from his manner that he had recognised me long before I saw him. He shook hands very cordially, and then sat down beside me. His first question was why my little Yorkshire terrier was not with me as usual ; had I left him in town ?

'Oh no,' I returned, 'Roy always accompanies me to Bayfield, but he was so busily engaged this morning

hunting for imaginary rabbits in the wilderness that I would not disturb him.'

He smiled at that.

'I was sorry to find you and Mrs. Darnell out the other afternoon. I rather thought of repeating the attempt either to-day or to-morrow.'

'You had better come a little later,' I observed; 'we are seldom back from our drive before five.'

'I will remember that.' Then, with a quick change of tone, 'Miss Darnell, I am sorry to see that you are still far from well—I hoped that your few days at home would have done you good.' He looked at me with grave kindness as he spoke; his tone, quiet as it was, conveyed to me that he was sorry to see my changed look.

'Thank you, but I am not ill,' rather miserably,— 'I mean not physically ill'; for there are maladies of the mind more difficult to diagnose, and infinitely more painful.

He paused a moment, hesitated as though not sure of his ground. 'Miss Darnell, it is easy to see that you are in trouble. I should like to help you if possible—if you would not think me impertinent or interfering.'

"Interfering," almost indignantly. 'Oh, if you only could help me; but I fear—I greatly fear—that no one can lift my burden.'

'No one human, perhaps,' in a tone which, gentle as it was, seemed to revive my want of faith. 'Will it make things a little easier if I tell you frankly that I know the cause of your trouble.' I looked at him, too much surprised to speak. How had he guessed it? But his next speech fully enlightened me. 'The day after my return from town I called at Prior's Cot. I

found Mrs. Darnell looking ill and much depressed. We had a long talk, and she was good enough to confide in me, and tell me much about her former life. She said that she had always intended to do so, that she owed it to me as her clergyman.

'Then you know!' but here I stopped rather awkwardly.

'I know that Mrs. Darnell is your mother,' he went on calmly; 'but I shall surprise you when I tell you that I had already guessed that fact before she said a word to me.'

'But why—how—what can you mean?' I asked in some perplexity.

'Do you not remember what I said to you that afternoon in the railway compartment—that I have strange intuitions at times? As I sat opposite to you I was struck by a decided likeness to Mrs. Darnell—you were in pain, and your eyes were closed. In spite of the dissimilarity of colouring, there was a remarkable resemblance between you; the truth seemed to flash into my mind. You were in great trouble, that was evident. I saw at once you had had a shock. There were other reasons, which I will not mention, which strengthened me in my surmise; if you knew them you would not be surprised that I said to myself, "Mrs. Darnell is her mother, and she is just aware of the fact."'

I was intensely relieved by this explanation—I do not know why; but I was glad and thankful that my mother had given Mr. Carlyon her confidence. I knew how good his influence would be; his knowledge of the world and human nature was so great that he was less likely to fail by want of tact.

'Did—did my mother tell you all, Mr. Carlyon?'

'She told me a great deal which, pardon me, must be sacred even from her daughter.'

'Oh, I did not mean that,' with a faint blush. 'So far from expecting you to repeat anything that passed between you, I have refused to allow any one to tell me things'; and then in a very stumbling fashion, and with many hesitations and pauses, I made him understand how I had felt the worshipping love for my father which refused to listen to anything that threw discredit on his honoured name; the pity and yearning sadness I felt on my mother's account; my ardent desire for a reconciliation.

I could see from Mr. Carlyon's intent look how deeply he was interested. Now and then he said a word or two to encourage me, and at times when I paused he would annotate some speech; when, for instance, I spoke of my affection for my father, and my desire to spare him pain, he said in his quiet way, 'One can so fully understand that; he was mother as well as father to you, and you held him with both hands.'

And again, when I spoke of my distress at my mother's evident unhappiness, he returned rather quickly, 'It is not wise to make large demands on human nature; it is so much better to expect little, and then "the much" comes as a glad surprise.' I found this speech a little enigmatical. I fancied that he was alluding to my mother, and did not wish to speak too plainly. Perhaps even Mr. Carlyon, with all his experience and wisdom, found her a baffling personality—ice without and fire within—a bed-rock of obstinate reserve and threatening volcanic upheaval,—certainly not an easy nature to master.

Perhaps his sympathetic manner drew me near; he certainly inspired me with confidence, and I found

myself telling him things which it surprised me to remember afterwards, though I did not repent even then.

I have a keen remembrance of his moved look when I told him of my intense longing for a reconciliation; I heard him say, as though to himself, 'Poor child, and yet the age of miracles has passed.'

'Does that mean that you also are hopeless of results?' I asked in a dejected tone.

Then he seemed to take counsel with himself. 'I will not deceive you,' he returned slowly: 'as far as I can judge, there is no adequate cause why Mrs. Darnell should not take her rightful place in your home. I cannot help thinking that the time has come for her to do so, and that she is making a sad mistake if she does not realise this.'

'Oh, I was so sure you would say that!' clasping my hands.

'Any one would say the same; and yet, humanly speaking, I can see very little reason to be hopeful. It is not possible for me to speak plainly, but there is no harm in my saying this one thing—your mother has a higher ideal than most people. She has also a strong will. I was wrong, let me confess it, in saying that the age of miracles was past. It was a faithless speech, and I cry shame to myself for having uttered it. Can anything be too hard for the Lord?' There was a touch of priestliness in his voice which awed me a little, but when he next spoke there was a new gentleness in his voice.

'God forbid that I should break the bruised reed. Miss Darnell, let me say one word of comfort. Do not renounce your mission; go on as you are doing—only pray more, and be patient. "Blessed are the peacemakers"—take that as your motto for the

present—yea, and they shall be blessed.' He stopped abruptly, and rose from his seat and paced up and down once or twice while I watched him. He had given me little hope, and yet I felt soothed and in some measure comforted. 'Go on as you are doing, and pray more, and be patient'—did he guess how I needed patience? And then he had pronounced that benediction. When he came back to me I held out my hand to him.

'Thank you, Mr. Carlyon, you have been very kind. I will try and take your advice.'

'I have not helped you much, I am afraid'—retaining my hand in his firm, warm grasp—'but at least I can promise you my prayers'; and then he sat down again beside me and asked me in the kindest manner if there was anything else he could do for me, any point on which he could advise me.

I considered this for a moment.

'I should like your opinion on one thing,' I returned presently; 'am I wrong in thinking that my duty lies principally with my father? I am so strongly biassed that I fear my own wishes may blind me a little.'

'I see what you mean; you would like an unprejudiced opinion. No, Miss Darnell, I cannot see how you can do otherwise; you are in a measure responsible for the care of your father's household. You cannot desert your post.'

'Oh, thank you, thank you.'

He gave me a friendly little smile at that. 'Do not add to your difficulties by too much introspection. Take things as simply as you can. Believe me, there is rare virtue in simplicity; that is why children are such object lessons to us. Shall we walk back now?

We can talk as we go ; and will you let me change the subject ? You look tired, and we may as well let worries lie like sleeping dogs. I want to tell you something which rather amused me just now—indeed I could not help smiling as I crossed the meadow. I think you and Mrs. Darnell take a great deal of interest in old Peggy Knowles.'

'Oh yes, the dear old thing ! but mother and I are so afraid that she is going to die.'

'Peggy is not afraid'—with a reassuring smile ; 'we have been having a long talk this morning. She thinks she is not likely to see the sun rise again, and she was anxious to set her house in order. She was always a methodical, tidy sort of body ; and in my experience, Miss Darnell, people die very much as they have lived—the old habits cling to them like well-worn garments.'

'But Peggy is such a good old woman.'

'Granted ; but even good old women have their little harmless fads and fancies. Peggy wanted me to reassure her on a few trifling points. Her worldly possessions were not many, nevertheless she felt as great a sense of responsibility with regard to them as though she were a multi-millionaire. When her mind was relieved I read to her. I chose, as I generally do in such cases, the fourteenth of St. John—"In my Father's house are many mansions."'" He smiled again to himself at the recollection, and then went on : 'I was a trifle surprised when Peggy seemed still a little restless and uneasy ; her face grew long and pitiful as a child's.

"What is the trouble, Peggy?" I asked, laying down the book. "Don't you think it is a grand thing that our heavenly home should be made all ready for us?"

“It is not that, sir,” she returned ; “it is the thought of the fine big house that worries me a bit. It is not as though Steeve and I had children—and what should we do with a grand mansion all to ourselves? Vicar, dear,” pulling at my sleeve in a coaxing way, “aren’t there no cottages in Heaven?” I hope it will not shock you, Miss Darnell, that I assured the poor old thing that I had not a doubt of it.’ And as he looked at me with that kind, humorous smile, I forgot my sadness in a girlish laugh.

CHAPTER XXVI

STELLA DELIVERS MY MESSAGE

Where love is there cometh sorrow, to-day or else to-morrow.
Endure the mood, love only means our good. . . .
Be love thy watch and ward, be love thy starting-point,
Thy goal and thy reward.

C. ROSSETTI.

Life is measured by intensity, not by dial, dropping sand, or watch.

GEORGE MACDONALD.

AS we crossed the little goose green before the Vicarage gate, Mr. Carlyon looked at his watch and exclaimed at the lateness of the hour.

'I see Mrs. Darnell coming round the corner of the lane,' he observed; 'she is probably looking out for you. Will you explain to her that I am expecting an old friend to luncheon, and as his train was due half an hour ago, I should not be surprised if he is already in my study awaiting me; so I must not stay another moment. I will call at Prior's Cot another afternoon.'

He lifted his hat with a pleasant smile. In spite of his grey hair, and the lines that trouble had traced upon his face, he looked young, alert, and full of life. I have never seen any one in the least like Mr. Carlyon; his personality was at once unique and complex. There was a strange mixture of strength

and tenderness about him, and a certain lurking sense of humour that saved him from pessimism. He was not a man to speak easily of his deepest feelings; his innate dignity and sense of what was fitting in his position forbade this. I had heard people call him proud and reserved. Lady Wilde once said so, and my mother had been quite indignant with her, and had defended him with a good deal of spirit. And as we walked back through the plantations she had been almost crushing in her remarks on Lady Wilde's want of perception.

'The fact is, a woman like Lady Wilde,' she observed, 'is quite incompetent to judge of a fine nature like Mr. Carlyon's; she does not in the least understand him. His pride is simply self-respect, and his reserve is only natural under the circumstances'; and as I learnt to know him better, I fully agreed with her.

Mr. Carlyon was right. My mother had grown uneasy at my prolonged absence.

'I thought Mr. Carlyon was with you,' she observed, a little quickly; and I explained how we had met in the Feltham Road, and then I gave her his message.

'But we are always out driving in the afternoon, Githa.'

'Yes, I know; but we are generally in by five.'

'I suppose you told him that?'

'Yes, I believe so'; and my mother said no more, but her manner gave me the impression that his visit would not be welcome to her.

This idea was confirmed, when the following afternoon the carriage was ordered half an hour later, and it was nearly six before we returned. Of course, Mr. Carlyon had called; and two afternoons later he came again, with the same result.

I was quite sure that my mother had no wish to disappoint me. Probably she did not for one moment guess how great the disappointment was. She was simply anxious to avoid an embarrassing situation. Her confidential talk with Mr. Carlyon made her averse to seeing him again in my presence. She seemed to regret his second fruitless visit, and announced her intention of sending him a note of apology. As it was my last day at Bayfield, it was rather tantalising to hear that she intended to remain at home the following day, and had invited him to tea. I heard afterwards that he excused himself; possibly, with all his good nature, he could not deny himself this little piece of revenge.

With the exception of this one drawback, the remainder of my visit passed tranquilly enough. My mother had evidently made up her mind to have no more risky arguments. We resumed our old habits. Every evening she read aloud to me, or I played to her; but she never again asked me to sing, neither did I volunteer to do so.

I regretted leaving Bayfield without bidding Mr. Carlyon good-bye; for, except in church, I did not see him again. But I hoped that he would understand that it was not my fault.

It was impossible for me to go to the Vicarage, but I saw the twins constantly in the churchyard. It seemed their favourite playground. They always called it 'the dead garden'; and if there was a funeral, Golliwog was always brought to witness it. I have seen him more than once perched on a tombstone, to the evident consternation of the birds. His ridiculous black head and red tie were always in close proximity to his doating master. I think I loved Stella more

every day; the very sound of her dear little voice seemed to thrill me. 'There's my Girlie,' she would say, in a tone of rapture—'my sweet, dear, darling Girlie'; and Cyril would hum the refrain in his sing-song fashion, 'sweet, dear, darling Girlie.'

On the last morning Stella seemed unusually pleased to see me. She slipped a small and rather grimy hand into mine. 'There is such a big, big, great hole over there,' she observed, with very round eyes. 'Peace won't never let Cyril and me go near such places; she says we might tumble in.'

'Well, so you might, dear,' I replied anxiously, for the yawning grave in the distance seemed to me a deadly peril. But I need not have been alarmed; nothing would have induced the children to disobey Peace. With all their oddities and innocent profanities they were reliable little creatures.

'Peace will let us look into the hole if you hold our hands tight,' she continued coaxingly. 'Perhaps Cyril's too busy feeding his new horse; he wants Golliwog to have a ride'; and Cyril assented to this. 'Then you and me will come, Girlie,' she continued innocently; 'and you won't let me tumble in, will you, dear?'—throwing back her brown mane in the most fascinating way.

I had rather a repugnance to look in at an open grave, but I could not shake Stella's determination; so I could only hold her hand so tightly that she winced with pain.

'You are pinching me dreadfully, Girlie,' she said quite crossly at last; and then I relaxed my hold a little—not much, however, for she was hanging over the brink in a way that made me giddy.

'What can make you care to look down into a

horrid black hole!' I exclaimed at last, puzzled at her rapt expression.

'Oh, I am only looking for the poor dear worms,' she returned blissfully. 'Don't you like worms, Girlie? They are such sweet wriggling things.'

'Good gracious! no, Stella. I hate and detest them.'

'Well, Peace always says they are nasty things,' she returned, in a composed voice; 'but Boy says nothing is nasty that God made'; and Stella's face assumed a heavenly expression. 'Of course the poor worms can't help being ugly, and as they have no legs, they must wriggle, you know. Cyril and me used to try and help them. We carried them quite a long way, but Peace said she could not bear to see it—it seemed to turn her inside. Of course'—with seraphic gentleness—'we wouldn't do it after that. We did not want Peace to turn anything, so we don't cuddle them no more.'

I was glad when Stella changed the subject.

I could not stay long with the children that morning. I told them that I was going away that afternoon, and they both kissed me hard and begged me to stay; and then it suddenly struck me that I might send a message to Mr. Carlyon by Stella. She was a very knowing little person, and might be trusted to deliver it. I therefore commenced setting about my task.

'I shall not be able to see your father before I go,' I began, 'but I wanted to bid him good-bye.' Then Stella took hold of my hand.

'Boy's in the study—come now,' she observed. 'He won't be cross with you, Girlie, though he is busy—dreadful busy.'

'No—no—I would not interrupt him for worlds'—growing quite hot at the idea. 'Suppose you give him a nice little message.' Stella nodded.

'Tell him I am leaving this afternoon, and am sorry not to wish him good-bye.'

Stella shut her eyes, and put her fingers in her ears. 'That's quite long enough,' she remonstrated; and to my great amusement she repeated the words over and over again to fix them on her memory: 'Tell him I am leaving this afternoon, and am sorry not to wish him good-bye—and Girlie sends her love.'

'Stella, you know I never told you to say that. You may give my kind regards if you like.'

'I don't know what kind regards mean. Do you, Cyril? Love is ever so much nicer.'

Then I began to repent my misplaced confidence. After all, Stella was only a baby—a perverse baby, too, to look at her mutinous little mouth.

'Well, then, say nothing but what I told you first—that I am going away, and am sorry not to bid him good-bye. That is quite a long enough message for your small head.' But Stella suddenly assumed an injured expression.

'Boy won't like that message one little bit; he likes lots of love.' But I would not listen.

'Stella, darling, don't be tiresome. You must say what I tell you—and nothing else. Now I must go.' And as soon as I could disengage myself from their clinging arms, I hurried back to Prior's Cot. I comforted myself with the thought that Stella had only been teasing me, and that she was really to be trusted; but I should not have been quite so easy in my mind if I had guessed the free translation of that message, which was repeated to me long afterwards:

'Girlie is going away this afternoon, and is so sorry she can't bid you good-bye, Boy. She looked sorry—didn't she, Cyril?—just as though she were going to cry.'

'But she didn't cry, Paul.'

'No, of course not—big, grown-up young ladies don't behave in that ridiculous fashion. I expect Miss Darnell was trying not to laugh.'

'Oh no, indeed, Boy dear, she was quite, quite grave! I wanted her to send love—lots of love—but she got quite red—didn't she, Cyril?—and said I was to give something, but I forget what.'

'Kind regards, perhaps?'

'There! to think of you guessing it!' in an admiring tone. 'Don't you love Girlie, Boy?' But here the narrator checked himself in rather a guilty fashion.

I knew that my mother intended to drive with me to the station. She seemed silent and rather depressed during luncheon, and I could not help saying in a tone of regret that I was sorry to leave her alone. 'If only Sydney were not away,' I added; but she looked at me with rather an inscrutable smile.

'Sydney is a dear girl, and, as you know, I am very fond of her, but I think I am rather glad than otherwise that she is absent just now; and then'—in rather a sad voice—'it is sometimes a relief not to make efforts.'

My mother's speech did not tend to raise my spirits. 'Will it always be like this?' I thought, a little bitterly, as I went upstairs to put on my hat. It was evident to me that she intended to say no word about the probable date of my next visit; she had told me plainly that for the future I was to decide such matters for myself. I was to be free to come and go as I liked, and yet it seemed to me that such liberty only added to my perplexity.

I do not know how it happened, but we were only just in time for the train, and our good-bye was a hurried one. The guard almost lifted me into the

compartment, and banged the door; but I let down the window and leaned out for a parting look. My mother stood a little apart—the afternoon sunshine seemed to illuminate her pale face. How beautiful she looked! Her tall, graceful figure in the grey gown looked wonderfully youthful, but, oh, the unspeakable sadness in her eyes! Though she waved her hand and tried to smile, I felt a strange sinking of heart as the train moved out of the station. I was leaving her to her loneliness and sorrow—true, it was not my fault; but none the less I suffered.

When I reached town I was surprised and pleased to see father awaiting me on the platform. It was the first time he had ever done so. He declared the fineness of the evening had tempted him, but I knew better than that; and as I took my seat beside him in the phaeton a pleasant sense of comfort and enjoyment stole over me.

‘So I have got you back, Gipsy?’ he said, looking at me affectionately as he took the reins from the groom.

‘Have you missed me very much, father?’

‘Oh, Darnell always misses Co.,’ he returned lightly; and then, with a change of tone, ‘I hope you have left your mother well.’ He said it so naturally that I almost started.

‘Yes—No. I do not think that she is as strong as she used to be. She tires so easily, and I think—I am sure—she is thinner.’

He frowned, but made no answer, and I thought it better to change the subject.

‘I suppose you have not come across Sydney?’ I asked presently.

‘Yes, I stumbled upon the whole party at the

Army and Navy Stores yesterday—Colonel Etheridge and his daughter, and another lady, whom he introduced as his sister. What a charming girl Miss Herbert is! She was always a favourite of mine, Gipsy. By-the-bye, as we were talking, another of your Bayfield acquaintances joined us—an exceedingly handsome fellow. Ah, I see you recognise the description.'

Was it my fancy, or did father look at me a little searchingly?

'Of course you mean Thurston Wilde, father dear. We are so afraid that he and Sydney are falling in love with each other, and as Lady Wilde and Colonel Etheridge want to make up a match between him and Rhona there will be a regular muddle.'

To my surprise father seemed quite indignant at this. 'Rhona—do you mean that little fair quiet girl? What an absurd idea! One might as well fall in love with a little white mouse. Fancy contrasting her with Miss Herbert! I hope they will allow the poor lad to choose his wife for himself.' I hinted vaguely at Thurston's dependence on his grandmother, but father was quite wrathful at the idea. 'Mediæval rubbish,' he remarked contemptuously. 'We don't live in the Dark Ages, Gip. A fine young fellow like that——' And then I saw that father had taken one of his sudden likings for my old playfellow.

'By-the-bye, Gipsy, I have a message for you from Miss Herbert. They want you to go over to luncheon to-morrow, and Colonel Etheridge has civilly included me in the invitation.'

'Oh, I am so glad, for I should certainly not have left you the first day. Are you sure it will not bore you, father?'

'Not in the least, my dear. They seem pleasant

people, and I find Colonel Etheridge and I have mutual friends.' And then it was settled that I should send Rhona a note accepting the invitation for us both.

We spent a very pleasant evening; but more than once I saw father look at me with rather a dissatisfied expression, and later—just as I was about to wish him good-night—he detained me.

'Gipsy, I don't think you are looking quite like your old self. Did—did—your mother question you about your health?'

'She thought I was not as well as usual,' I returned reluctantly. 'A little run down—below par, as Dr. Tressiter says'; for our dear old doctor had died two years before this, and Dr. Tressiter had taken the practice. He had attended father when he had influenza, and we both liked him.

'I was sure my eyes did not deceive me,' he returned quite anxiously. Father always made a fuss if my finger ached. 'I shall have Tressiter round to look at you'; but I would not hear of this for a moment.

'You must do nothing of the kind,' I returned rebelliously. 'I am quite well—really well, father—only so troubled.'

'Troubled, my darling?' And then as he drew me closer to him I put down my head on his shoulder and poured out to him a little of the pain that had oppressed me. He listened quietly and without interrupting me until I had finished.

'Did your mother know all this, Gipsy?'

'Yes, we had a long talk about it. She was very kind and loving, and I think she understood. Father dear'—pressing my cheek against his, as the child Githa used to do in the old days—'do you know what I

said to her? "Father and I both love you ; we both want you to come home." I felt him start almost convulsively.

'What did she say?' he whispered ; but I would not tell him that, and he did not repeat his question. Probably he guessed the answer.

He held me in silence for a moment, and I could feel the strong beating of his heart. Then he kissed me very hurriedly and rose. 'Go on asking her,' he said, in a curious husky voice, 'and tell your mother that what you said is true as death. There, good-night, my little blessing' ; but it was father who left the room first.

CHAPTER XXVII

A CHEQUE FROM DARNELL AND CO.

Be yourself—simple, honest, and unpretending—and you will enjoy through life the respect and love of friends.—SHENNAN.

What do we live for, if it is not to make life less difficult to each other?—GEORGE ELIOT.

THE luncheon party at Belmont House was very pleasant. Of course Thurston was there. He sat by me and seemed in excellent spirits. He was staying with an elderly cousin in Bayswater. I fancied, from a hint he dropped in the course of conversation about Mr. Manifold's pecuniary difficulties, that he was a paying guest; but he certainly spent most of his time at the Etheridges'. He assured me that he was having a good time and enjoying himself immensely, and that 'Gran,' as he called her, had given him a free hand. 'I am to stay as long as I feel disposed,' he observed complacently. Sydney and Rhona sat opposite to us, and I noticed that both girls looked rather conscious as he glanced at them; and Sydney turned hastily to father, who was her next neighbour, and said something to him in a low voice; but I saw that her cheeks were quite pink, as though there were some occult meaning in Thurston's speech.

We saw a good deal of Sydney and the Etheridges during the next fortnight or three weeks, and Thurston was generally with them. We rode together in the Park, and made appointments to meet at some picture gallery or exhibition. Once I accompanied them to the theatre, and on another evening father took a box at the Albert Hall for a grand concert, and we included Miss Redford in the party. The music was beautiful, and I should have enjoyed it intensely but for my uneasiness about Thurston.

He would persist in remaining at the back of the box, where he could talk to Sydney; and no hints on mine or Colonel Etheridge's part could induce him to change his place. I saw poor little Rhona glancing timidly once or twice in his direction; as the evening went on she grew paler and paler, and there was such a tired look in her blue eyes. I was not surprised to see Colonel Etheridge frowning and pulling his moustache rather fiercely. I do not know what would have happened, only father, who is very quick in such matters, suddenly grasped the situation, and asked me to change places with Miss Herbert. Sydney rose with such alacrity that I felt sure that she had been uncomfortable; but Thurston looked vexed and a little sulky—he was utterly reckless that evening. But Sydney was looking so sweet in her new dress, that perhaps he had some excuse for his rash behaviour.

Sydney had prolonged her visit for another week, and the evening before she went back to Bayfield they were all to dine at St. Olave's Lodge, with the exception of Mrs. Etheridge, who never went out in the evening. Of course Thurston was included, and father wished me to invite Aunt Cosie, and Miss Redford and her *fiancé* Mr. Pelham. It was my first large dinner-

party, and father took a great deal of interest in the arrangements. I wore my prettiest dress, and Mardie seemed to admire the result excessively. Father only said, 'You look nicer than usual, Gipsy,' and turned hastily away. I wondered why his face wore such a pained expression ; but he told me afterwards that the thought had suddenly crossed his mind, 'If only my mother could have seen me !'

Aunt Cosie said a great many kind things to me that night. 'You are a very young hostess, Githa, my dear,' she observed ; 'but you did extremely well, and I am quite sure that Colonel Etheridge enjoyed his dinner, and you divided your attentions very prettily between him and Mr. Pelham.'

Aunt Cosie was sleeping at our house that night, and as father was in the room he overheard her little speech, for he came behind us and put his hand on my shoulder.

'Gipsy was a regular darling ! Constance, don't you think that I have every right to be proud of my little girl' ; but father's look said more than his words.

'It is a blessing that Githa has turned out as well as she has,' returned Aunt Cosie quite seriously ; 'for the way you and Mrs. Marland have spoiled her, Philip, is enough to turn the child's brain.' But father only laughed, and assured her that I was unspoilable.

I was glad that they were both so satisfied with me, for I wanted so much to please father. I knew that he intended to entertain his friends more frequently, and that I should have far more onerous duties to discharge in the future, and I wished to accustom myself to them ; but how little he and Aunt Cosie guessed at the strange sinking of heart under my

outward cheerfulness. I was in my mother's place—how was I to forget that?

I was relieved to see that Thurston behaved more discreetly this evening. I had arranged that he should take Rhona in to dinner; and, as Miss Redford was on the other side, he had no opportunity to transgress, especially as Sydney was somewhat screened from his view. Rhona had her innings that evening, and the poor little thing certainly looked happier; but when I said so to father he only shrugged his shoulders.

I never could get father to be properly interested in Rhona. He always spoke rather disparagingly of her; he used to call her 'little Miss Prim,' or 'Prunes and Prism.' I took him to task at last.

'I can't imagine why you are so prejudiced against poor Rhona,' I said in quite a hurt tone. 'It is not like you, dear; for you are always so kind and attentive to even unattractive people, and really Rhona is not the least plain. I am sure that she looked quite pretty the other night'; and then I proceeded in my enthusiastic way to tabulate her virtues. But father was bent on provoking me, and sometimes when he chose he could be extremely obstinate.

'What! all those good qualities!' he exclaimed. 'No wonder the poor little girl suffers from moral indigestion. I suppose that gives her that flabby, colourless look.' But of course he was only teasing me; he simply considered her an uninteresting young person, and nothing made him more indignant than to hint at Colonel Etheridge's desire to annex Thurston Wilde as a son-in-law. He said quite seriously that such a marriage would be utterly disastrous to both of them. 'Granted that your little friend fancies herself in love with him, would it not be better for one

to suffer than for both to be miserable?' Father evidently meant what he said; he felt strongly on the matter.

'Any one can see that he cares for Miss Herbert,' he went on, 'and as far as I can judge I should say his affection is reciprocated,' and he looked rather sharply at me as though challenging me to deny the fact; but I could not perjure myself. I saw more plainly every day, however Sydney might be trying to blind herself and Thurston, that her heart was no longer in her own keeping.

'Of course I see you agree with me,' went on father triumphantly, 'and I don't understand why you are not on their side, for I never saw a better matched pair. He is a thoroughly nice fellow, and Miss Herbert is one of the most charming girls I ever met, and small blame to Wilde if he thinks her the dearest girl in the world.'

I was so fond of Sydney that I could not help giving father a grateful hug for speaking so nicely of her.

'I don't deny that they seem made for each other,' I returned; 'but you forget, dear, that Sydney is quite poor, and that Thurston is dependent on his grandmother.' But father only said, 'Pshaw, what does that matter; if the old lady cuts up rough, which I don't believe for a moment, he has a head and two hands, and they are both young enough to wait.' And though I tried to explain to him that Thurston had not been brought up wisely and was not fitted for any profession, father persisted in his opinion.

'He could find some work to suit him,' he remarked quite severely. 'Necessity is the mother of invention, as you know—it will make a man of him. Anything would

be better than selling himself for money. Mercenary marriages are certainly not made in heaven, Gipsy ; the devil has far too much to do with them ' ; and as in my secret heart I agreed with everything he said, I allowed him to have the final word.

We began talking about Miss Redford after this ; and Aunt Cosie, who had just entered the room, joined in the conversation.

' Claudia always looks well in evening dress,' she observed, ' her neck and shoulders are finely moulded and she holds herself well ; but both Githa and I were sorry to see how thin and worn she had grown lately. Really no one would think that she is only two years older than Helen !'

' Mrs. Seymour has certainly grown younger since her marriage,' observed my father.

' Yes, indeed,' returned Aunt Cosie happily ; ' really, that marriage, improvident as we thought it at the time, has turned out remarkably well. I had quite a nice talk with Claudia last night. Hamlyn Seymour's prospects seem to warrant them in taking a comfortable house. They have seen one likely to suit them quite close to Cicely,' she said. ' Helen was in such spirits about it ; and really with two babies that doll-house of a flat is too absurd.'

We both assented to this, though I took care to add that Helen was so good a manager that she always contrived to keep her doll-house as neat and cosy as possible ; ' if only Mr. Pelham had a chance of getting on as well,' I concluded. I fancied father smiled in rather a knowing way when I said this ; but as he made no remark I thought I must be mistaken. In fact, he changed the subject as though it bored him.

Aunt Cosie spent nearly a week with us. Father

and I loved having her ; she was such a dear peaceful soul. I never knew any one so kind and tactful, and as Sydney had gone back to Bayfield I was very glad of her companionship. I wanted her advice too, for I was taking up the reins of domestic government just then, and Aunt Cosie was just the right person to help me. She had been a notable housewife in her day, and had all kinds of little methods. She was kind enough to tell me that I was an apt scholar.

‘Keep a firm hand on the reins, Githa,’ she said once ; ‘never mind your age, you must maintain your position as mistress of your father’s house. There is one disadvantage in having reliable old servants, that they are apt to get their own way—even make their own rules.’

‘You see they have known me from a child, Aunt Cosie.’

‘Just so, and it is difficult for them to recognise that you are a child no longer ; for example, Mrs. Kennedy had no right to make that alteration in the menu without consulting you.’

‘So I told her. I did not take it quietly, I assure you, Aunt Cosie, for I had been much vexed at the time, and Kenny had apologised most humbly.’

‘I am glad to hear it, my dear ; you must put your foot down once for all, it will save you trouble in the future.’ And I was careful to follow this advice, for Hallett, faithful and devoted as he was, was not wholly immaculate, and if he differed from me about some table arrangement, was given to maintain his opinion with a tenacity which borders on obstinacy. On these occasions I never argued the point, but quietly referred the matter to father.

The day after the dinner-party Thurston paid a formal call ; but he did not stay long, he had to meet

Colonel Etheridge and Rhona in town. I asked him how much longer he intended to remain. I thought the question rather embarrassed him. He hesitated, looked down, and then replied briefly that he had not made up his mind, but that he would probably return to Bayfield in a day or two. He must have made up his mind very quickly after this, for we heard he went back the very next day; Rhona told us so when she called. I thought she did not look quite happy, though she added that they were probably returning themselves the following week.

Rhona had an engagement and would not stay for tea; but directly she left we had another visitor, Miss Redford.

'I am so glad to find you and Mrs. Bevan alone,' she said quickly as she greeted us; and then it struck me that her manner was less collected than usual, and that her eyes were unusually bright.

'You look well, Claudia,' observed Aunt Cosie, 'and you have quite a colour.'

'Yes, I walked fast, and it is rather warm. Helen and I have been to see the house, and Hamlyn met us there. They have quite decided to take it. We all lunched with Cicely, so we were quite a family party.'

'That must have been delightful.'

'I am so glad dear Helen will have such a charming home,' went on Aunt Cosie in her comfortable way. 'You will have your work cut out, Claudia, for she will need your help.'

'I am afraid I have other work to do,' returned Miss Redford, with a heightened colour. 'Dear Mrs. Bevan, you have always been such a good friend to us that I am very pleased to have the opportunity of telling my good news to you and Githa together.'

Elmer has had a good post offered him—it is likely to be lucrative—and'—here her lips quivered with emotion—'we are to be married at the end of June.'

I think Reddy must have been satisfied with the way we received her news—I never saw Aunt Cosie so pleased about anything. To my amazement she told us that it was my father's interest and exertion that had brought them this piece of good luck.

'I am more grateful to Mr. Darnell than I can express,' she went on, and there were actually tears in her eyes. 'I know how much he has always thought of Elmer, and when he heard of this vacancy he lost no time in recommending him. You have no idea of the trouble he has taken about it, Githa.'

'You will be able to have a nice house too, Claudia,' observed Aunt Cosie in a delightfully sympathetic tone.

'We have no time to think about that now,' returned Miss Redford, with quite a youthful blush. 'Elmer thinks we had better take some comfortable rooms for the present, and look for a house at our leisure. Cicely insists on the wedding being from her house, and both she and Dr. Burford have advised me to leave the Nutshell and stay with them.'

'And a very good idea too,' exclaimed Aunt Cosie. 'Cicely will help you with your shopping, and it will be far more comfortable for you and Mr. Pelham'; and Reddy assented to this.

'We have stipulated for a quiet wedding,' she continued. 'Elmer has very strong opinions on this point, and I agree with him—that when middle-aged people marry, the less fuss they make about it the better. I intend to have no bridesmaids, not even the children; but I hope you will be with me, Githa, and if Mrs. Bevan and Mr. Darnell will honour us——' but at that

moment father came in to answer for himself. No one could accuse Miss Redford of want of feeling or coldness of manner at that moment; she turned quite pale when father took her hand and congratulated her in his kind way—she really seemed hardly able to speak. 'It is all owing to you—to your goodness,' she said in a low voice; 'if you had not spoken for Elmer——' but father would not let her go on.

'Tut, nonsense. Do you suppose that I would allow a clever fellow like Pelham to be shunted in that fashion. "I have got a square man for a square hole," I said to them, "who will do you credit, and his name is Elmer Pelham," and that about settled the business. You must bring him to dinner, and then we will have a talk. Come, little housekeeper, name some evening before our Cousin Constance leaves us'; but to our regret Aunt Cosie could not be persuaded to stay. Claudia could come and lunch with her any day, she said, and a quartette was always better than an uneven number.

As soon as we had settled on the evening Miss Redford took her leave. She had done a hard day's work, and certainly looked a little tired.

That evening Aunt Cosie and I found plenty of occupation in discussing wedding presents. She told me that she thought of giving Claudia the same gift that she had selected for Helen—a nice little stock of house linen. Aunt Cosie was always very generous.

I did not know father was listening to us, but he suddenly flung down his paper.

'Gipsy,' he said seriously, 'I consider that we owe a good deal to Miss Redford, and I should like to do something handsome for her. Shall we furnish her house, Gip—you and I together? I can well afford

it ; and I don't believe they have a hundred pounds between them.'

'Oh, father, will you really? What a lovely idea!'

'I said we, not I,' he returned quickly; 'we go shares, Gip. I will tell you how we will do it. I will write a cheque to-morrow, and you shall take it to her; it is from Darnell and Co. You must tell her that—a wedding present from Darnell and Co.'

CHAPTER XXVIII

A TWILIGHT HOUR

All, all shall count ; the mingled joy and sorrow
To force of finer being rise at last ;
From the crude ores in trial's furnace smelted,
The image of the perfect life is cast.

FREDERICK L. HOSMER.

He may see what he maketh. Our dreams are the sequel of our waking knowledge.—EMERSON.

I NEVER shall forget the expression on Reddy's face when she read the little slip of paper in father's handwriting with the good wishes of Darnell and Co. inscribed on it, and then opened the cheque. Her incredulous joy made her incapable of speech. I forbear to state the amount—that was a secret of mine and father's,—but I shall not be wrong in saying that it was certainly a princely gift. But I knew how grateful he was to our dear Miss Redford for her devoted services on my behalf all these years.

Reddy was not an emotional person, and her feelings were always well under her control. Nevertheless, something very like a sob reached my ears. She said, huskily, that she had a catch in her throat, and would take a sip of cold water. I had sufficient tact not to offer to fetch it, and she withdrew for a few minutes.

When she returned her throat was quite clear, and she looked radiant.

'I shall write to your father, my dear Githa,' she said, when she had thanked me to the best of her ability; and she kept her word. It was certainly a beautiful letter, and when father handed it to me to read he said I had better put it away in a safe place, for it was too good to be destroyed.

When Miss Redford had regained calmness, she explained to me that the money would be a perfect godsend to her and Mr. Pelham.

'If it had not been for this munificent gift,' she went on, touching the cheque almost caressingly, 'we should have had to spend the first year or two of our married life in rooms, until we had saved up a sufficient sum for furniture, but now there will be no occasion for waiting.' I felt very glad to know this; and she went on in her bright, crisp way: 'Now I shall be able to get some nice things for myself, for dear Mrs. Bevan has promised to provide house linen, and Cicely and Dr. Burford will give us spoons and forks. Helen has set her heart on a grandfather's clock.'

'And your sister Agneta?'

'Well, you see, Aggie and Ernest are not very well off at present, though he will be all right when his Uncle Luxmore dies—he is his heir; but I daresay they will send me some oriental stuffs for decoration. I feel a perfect Cræsus, Githa, I assure you.'

We had quite a long talk after that. I remember wondering a little as I listened whether it were better to marry young, when all one's feelings were fresh and life seemed to stretch out invitingly before one, or whether it were safer to wait for the tried experience of

maturer years. Miss Redford must have been five or six-and-thirty at least, and she and Mr. Pelham had cared for each other for the last nine or ten years, though they had not been definitely engaged. The long waiting for their good things had certainly tried them. Mr. Pelham had got into bachelor ways, and looked older than his actual age. Nevertheless, when they dined with us the following evening no two people could have looked happier. Reddy was quite handsome that night, and I am sure Mr. Pelham thought so.

I think it was a good thing for us that we had this new source of interest to occupy us. I saw Miss Redford nearly every day, and at meal-time I had always plenty to tell father. My letters to my mother were full of feminine details, which I knew would interest her and Sydney, for mother always felt a great respect for Miss Redford; indeed, she announced her intention of sending her a wedding present. She asked my opinion, and we finally decided on a silver tea-pot and cream-jug.

I was thankful to have this fresh distraction for my thoughts, for I was not quite happy about father. He did not seem in his usual spirits, and though he denied that anything was wrong, something was evidently depressing him. We had both fallen into the habit of watching each other, and as the days went on I felt more and more convinced that I was the secret cause of his uneasiness. It was impossible for me to verify this vague impression, as he never said a word that offered me a clue, until one Sunday evening, when, as we were sitting out on the balcony, he asked me suddenly if I had made my summer plans.

I was rather taken aback by this question, for it seemed such a strange transmission of thought. I

had been worrying myself all the afternoon, thinking that June had come, and that I should have to make arrangements for August. I hesitated so long with my answer that he looked at me a little suspiciously.

‘I was only wondering if you would like to go abroad with me in September,’ he continued.

‘I thought Colonel Lindsay had taken the shooting lodge again at Braemar, and expected you to join him,’ I answered.

‘Yes, but I did not definitely accept his invitation ; besides, that is for August, and if you go down to Bayfield, I might possibly get him to put me up for a fortnight or three weeks.’

‘I think mother will expect me as usual,’ I returned. ‘She has not said a word in her letters about places. She may be intending to go to the seaside with Sydney, or to Wales, or the Westmorland Lakes, but I know she would like me to accompany her—that is, if you do not mind, father ; and I might go abroad with you later.’ But I sighed in rather an oppressed way as I concluded. Father echoed the sigh.

‘It is no use my minding,’ he said rather shortly. ‘You must do your duty by your mother, and as I have the lion’s share of your society I ought not to grumble. Well, I will close with Lindsay’s offer. I suppose you will be away for a month or six weeks?’

‘I suppose so,’ I returned dejectedly. ‘Oh, father, I think I hate leaving you more every year.’

He stroked my hair without speaking. I knew from his manner that he hated it too. ‘Poor little Gip,’ he murmured caressingly.

‘It does seem all so unnecessary and wrong,’ I continued earnestly. ‘Father, dear, will you mind very much if I ask you a question? You need not answer it if

you do not wish to do so. Have—have you ever asked mother to come home?’ But he never hesitated a moment.

‘I have asked her many times, darling.’ And this gave me courage for another question.

‘There is one thing I want to know, dear,’ I went on. ‘Have you—I mean, do you and mother ever meet?’

‘We have not met for years,’ he returned very gravely, and I saw at once that the question pained him. ‘Our last meeting was not a pleasant memory; it gave me no encouragement to repeat my visit.’ His tone was so hurt and proud that I could not bear to hear it. It was then that I noticed that his face was getting a little worn and tired. ‘It is hopeless, Githa, quite hopeless,’ he went on in the same dull, weary voice; ‘but,’ rousing himself with such a sad smile, ‘at least I have you, my darling.’

‘Yes, we have each other.’ Then I took his dear head between my hands and kissed it passionately, and as I did so I noticed how grey it was getting. ‘Nothing is really hopeless in God’s world, dearest; Mardie has often said that’; and then all at once it came into my head that I must tell him my beautiful dream about the Angel of Forgiveness. I had been so afraid of forgetting it that I had written it down. He seemed to listen with intense interest, and though he only remarked that it was a wonderful dream, I could see he was much moved, and by-and-by he told me it had done him good. ‘I have been in a hard, desponding mood lately,’ he continued. ‘I could have said with Cain, “My punishment is greater than I can bear”’; and then he said a strange thing—at least it seemed so to me until I understood what he meant,—‘Even my love for you adds to my punishment.’

Now it has struck me more than once, that when two people love each other very dearly, and spend a good many years together, they grow so close that they can often read each other's thoughts without the medium of words; the spiritual insight seems to deepen and enlarge its boundaries; and so a very little reflection made me comprehend father's meaning, and though I was glad when he explained himself more fully, I hardly needed such interpretation by word of mouth. It was a warm June evening, and we were sitting out on the balcony later than usual. The rosy flushes of sunset had long faded away, and the sweet, subtle twilight of a summer night was stealing over everything. The river, which had been scarcely greyer than a dove's wing, now looked dark and steely; in a little while the moon would rise. The lamps had been left unlighted in the drawing-room, and only the lights from the Embankment enabled us to see the outline of each other's faces. I think this gave father courage to speak.

'You do not misunderstand me, Gipsy?'

'No, dear; there is never any fear of my doing that.'

'Still, my last speech must have sounded a little strange; and yet how am I to make my meaning clear?' He got up from his seat and paced slowly up and down, as though movement were a relief; and then he leant upon the railing and spoke without turning his face to me.

'You know I still love your mother, Githa?'

Then I went quickly to his side and held his arm.

'Dear father, I know it, you need not tell me; and,' in a low voice, 'mother knows it too. Do you not remember that I told her that we both wanted her?'

Then he shivered slightly.

'I am not alluding to that. I only wished you to know that such thoughts are never out of my mind. Sometimes I should be glad to forget ; but you are so like her in little ways that this is impossible.'

'But I do not really resemble her, father ?'

'Not as she is at present, but when she was young and happy. You have the quick turn of the head ; and sometimes when you are pleased and excited about anything you speak with her voice.'

'Oh, father, do you really mean it ?' and I hardly knew whether to be glad or sorry until he assured me that the resemblance gave him pleasure as well as pain.

'You see,' he continued, 'I feel as though I have defrauded your mother of her life happiness, and amongst other things that I am robbing her of her child's affections. You do not love your mother as you do me, Githa ?' But my only answer was to clasp his arm more tightly.

'Of course it is natural under the circumstances,' he went on. 'If you had known her to be your mother all these years, the affection would have grown and developed ; but even now it is not too late.'

'Oh no, indeed. I hope not, father. But I do not understand her as I do you.' And then he sighed again.

'If she only knew how I long sometimes for her to see you. That evening, Gipsy, when you came to show me your dress, you looked such a darling ; but I could not tell you so, because I was thinking of her and what she was missing.'

'I understand, dear. Do not pain yourself by telling me all this, though, all the same, I love to hear it.'

'It is a relief to-night. You have been a comfort to me, little girl, since the hour you were born.' Then so low that I only just caught the words, 'Oh, Yvonne, Yvonne, if you only knew how to forgive!'

But after this he told me that it was getting chilly, and that we must both go in.

I cried myself to sleep that night, and yet I was thankful that we had had that talk. I felt that I had got nearer to father, that I had had wonderful glimpses into a loving and generous soul. He had passed through the furnace of pain, and it had refined and purified his nature. Whatever had been his sins or infirmities in the past, I felt instinctively that he was good now, sound and true to the very core of his being. My faith in him was so strong that I could stake my life on it. 'Aunt Cosie believes in him, too,' I would say to myself triumphantly.

I am afraid that the very intensity of my sympathy with father helped to heighten the barrier that seemed slowly rising between myself and my mother—so loving to me, so hard to him, so merciless to herself! What strange flaw of nature had marred the perfection of her womanhood? I could have wrung my hands with impotent pain and longing, but that night brought me no vision of comfort.

When I went down to the dining-room the next morning I was rather surprised to see a letter in my mother's handwriting lying beside my plate. I had had a long letter from her only two days before; but this seemed shorter.

I was hastily mastering the contents when father came in and wished me good-morning. I saw him glance at the envelope, then at my face. I suppose I had rather a worried expression.

‘What is wrong, Gipsy?’ he asked anxiously, and I put the letter in his hand. I thought it would be better for him to read it for himself.

My mother wrote that she was very much harassed and perplexed. Thurston had acted very foolishly: he had waylaid Sydney when she was going to the Schoolhouse on Thursday, and had proposed to her. Poor Sydney had been dreadfully distressed, but had refused him. She told him that he was behaving very badly to Rhona; but he denied that he had ever paid her the least attention, and declared that nothing would induce him to marry her.

“If you do not become my wife, Sydney, I will never have one”—those were his words, Githa. She got rid of him at last, and came to me at once and told me everything. Poor child, I never saw her in such a state. She did not attempt to deny that she cared for him. She was perfectly honest with me. “I know we love each other far too well ever to marry any one else,” she said quite frankly, “but I will not consent to ruin his prospects.” I had sad work with Sydney, and I had just talked her into calmness when a note from St. Helen’s Towers reached me. Lady Wilde begged me to go to her that afternoon, and, as I expected, a most unpleasant scene ensued. Thurston had announced his intention of marrying Sydney, and his grandmother was in a towering rage. I cannot write particulars, but I am most anxious to talk things over with you as soon as possible. Could you come down for a day or two, Githa? I shall have to make arrangements for Sydney, and it would be the greatest possible relief to have you.—Your devoted MOTHER.’

My father looked at me gravely. 'Of course you must go, Gipsy. Would it not be well to wire that you are going down this afternoon?'

'But we have promised to dine with Aunt Cosie.'

'Send her a note and tell her I will go alone; and, Gip, I may as well drive you to the station and put you under the care of the guard'; and I reluctantly acquiesced in this. I should have preferred waiting until the next day; but of course he was right, and it was better for me to go at once.

Before breakfast was over father had another brilliant idea.

'Why should you not bring Miss Herbert back with you?—we could keep her safe enough. Wilde will not venture to follow her here, and we should be glad to have her as long as your mother likes.' And this seemed such a charming arrangement that I determined to bring it about if possible.

CHAPTER XXIX

LAD'S LOVE

It is easy to smile when the sun smiles too,
And the sky is a field of blue ;
But give me a smile when the sun has gone
And the sky is of leaden hue.

ANON.

Constancy and faithfulness mean something else besides doing what is easiest and pleasantest to ourselves. They mean renouncing whatever is opposed to the reliance others have in us.—ANON.

I HAD hardly expected to find Sydney waiting for me on the platform when I reached Bayfield, but I was very glad to see her, and told her so.

'Of course, I always meet you, Githa,' she said, rather hurriedly ; and I saw at once she was a little shy and nervous with me, otherwise she looked much as usual.

Sydney was thoroughly healthy in mind and body. She would always take a sane view on all subjects, even when she felt most deeply ; there were no morbid complications in her nature. She was so perfectly natural that she would treat even a love trouble simply. At the end of our drive I told her she was an object lesson for other girls ; but she only shook her head a little sadly.

As I had hardly any luggage, Sydney had driven over in the pony carriage, so we could talk without any restraint. She began at once about this trouble, though she seemed unwilling to look at anything but the grey pony's head.

'It is very good of you to come so quickly, Githa dear. Aunt Yvonne is very much worried.'

'I expect she is fretting on your account, Sydney.'

'Yes; and she is so sorry for Thurston'—and here a deep flush came to Sydney's cheek. 'He is acting in such a reckless fashion, and Lady Wilde is so angry and mortified that she will not listen to reason. Aunt Yvonne will tell you all about it, for, of course, I have not been to St. Helen's Towers.'

'I don't quite see why you refused him, Sydney. Thurston knows very well that you care for him.'

'Perhaps that is the reason,' in a low voice. 'When one cares very much about a person, and wishes to be a help, not a hindrance, how could one ruin all his prospects? That would be a poor return for his generous affection.'

'And so you told him to marry Rhona—poor little insipid Rhona?'

'I did nothing of the kind, Githa,' turning to me indignantly. 'Why should I tell him to do a thing so absolutely wrong? No; I only pointed out to him that he had treated Rhona badly—and so he has. Why did he go there morning, noon, and night, until the poor little thing really believed that he cared for her? He was merely using her as a tool—and it was unfair and cruel.'

'Is that why you refused him, Sydney?'

'Yes; that and the other reason I gave you just now. He has quarrelled with his grandmother—the

poor old woman who has brought him up—and you know what an obstinate temper she has.'

I nodded, and Sydney went on.

'She was white with rage when Aunt Yvonne went in, and she said such insulting things about me that Aunt Yvonne told her that if she were not more careful of her words she should leave the house, and this brought her to her senses, and she half-apologised; but nothing could shake her resolve—that Thurston should marry Rhona. She declared that he had jilted the girl in the most shameful fashion; that Rhona was in love with him; and that Colonel Etheridge would be ready to horsewhip him for his treatment of his daughter. Aunt Yvonne could do nothing at all. Lady Wilde said that her son had given her enough to bear, but that she would not put up with it from her grandson.'

'Oh dear, oh dear, how dreadfully mediæval it all sounds! Do you really think she will disinherit him?'

'I am afraid so, Githa,' and here Sydney seemed on the verge of tears. 'She says that if Thurston persists in this dishonourable conduct she will have nothing more to do with him; she will stop his allowance, and he can work for his bread. Aunt Yvonne says she is determined to force him to do as she wishes; and what will he do, poor fellow?' and now the tears ran down Sydney's face. 'Both Aunt Yvonne and I know that he will never yield to her about Rhona.'

We were in sight of Prior's Cot by this time, and at the sound of our wheels my mother came out into the porch—the climbing roses seemed to frame her in crimson glory, and one lovely spray encircled her soft, silvery hair. I think I never saw a sweeter smile on any human face than the one that greeted me.

Strange to say, she said the very same words as Sydney—'It is good of you to come so quickly, Githa'; and then in a lower voice, 'It was kind of your father to spare you.' It was this latter part of her speech which made my kiss warmer than usual.

Sydney did not follow us into the drawing-room. She went upstairs to take off her hat, and for a few minutes we were alone.

My mother was looking at me somewhat critically. I was evidently her first thought. 'I expected to see you looking much better,' she observed, in rather a disappointed voice.

'Indeed! I am quite well, mother'; but she shook her head.

'People in good health do not lose flesh, my dear; and you are certainly thinner'; and then, with a touching little smile, 'My daughters are giving me a good deal of anxiety just now.'

'Oh, I am so sorry for Sydney, mother!'

'Yes; and she is so good and patient, and tries to hide her trouble. I expect she has told you that things are at a deadlock at present. Lady Wilde is behaving in a very early Victorian manner.'

'I should rather call it mediæval, mother. Father thinks her a regular old heathen; he seems to take Thurston's part.' Mother frowned slightly, and made no answer. Perhaps I had been wanting in tact to mention father's opinion; but just then Sydney came in, and the subject dropped for the present.

It was Sydney's evening at the Recreation Room—for the vicar had organised a series of 'Pleasant Evenings' for the elder girls and boys of the village, and this was the last evening until October.

I heard mother tell her that she should send

Rebecca to fetch her, and I quite understood why Sydney flushed in rather a distressed manner, even if she had not replied quickly, 'I do not think there will be any need for that, Aunt Yvonne. He will not be there to-night.'

'We had better be on the safe side,' was mother's answer,' and then Sydney said no more; she was always very docile and submissive—far more than I should have been in her position. 'Now we can take counsel together, Githa dear,' observed my mother, as Sydney disappeared from view. 'Come and sit down beside me,' and mother placed me cosily on the big Chesterfield couch, which could have held four of us comfortably. 'Now, what am I to do about Sydney?' she began; 'it is quite impossible for her to remain at Bayfield under the present circumstances. It is true that she has rejected Thurston, and that she is behaving as well as a girl can, but Thurston absolutely refused to take his answer: he told her that unless she could look him in the face and tell him that she did not care for him, that he would go on asking her to marry him; and of course poor Sydney could not do that.'

'How could she, mother, when she knows how dearly she loves him, and Thurston knows it too?'

'Yes, that is just the difficulty, my dear; but what is to be done? Lady Wilde is impossible. I have done all I can to soften her and bring her to reason, but she is an obstinate, bigoted old woman—and I nearly told her so to her face. She made me so angry by her unjust remarks on poor Sydney, that I nearly quarrelled with her—only she muttered an apology; and then one cannot help feeling sorry for her. You see Thurston's father gave her so much trouble, and

his marriage was such a blow to her, and now this second disappointment seems too hard to bear. I think in her own way that she is very fond of Thurston ; she has certainly indulged him a good deal.'

'She has given him the worst possible education for a young man who has to make his way in the world,' I returned severely ; 'and if she deprives him of his allowance as well as his home, she will be doing a brutal and shameful thing.' But though mother smiled at my vehemence, I knew she agreed with me ; indeed she told me a moment later that she had expressed her opinion to Lady Wilde with the utmost frankness.

"You have no right to treat your grandson as though he were committing a crime ; he has fallen in love with one of the sweetest and best girls in the world. Sydney's mother was a gentlewoman by birth as well as nature."

"I do not intend Thurston to marry a penniless girl, Mrs. Darnell," she returned angrily ; "besides, he is bound in honour to Rhona Etheridge ; they have been brought up together almost from children with the knowledge that her father and I had set our hearts on this marriage. If Thurston had objected earlier to the arrangement and told us so—if he had not paid attention to that poor child for years there might be some excuse for him." But I interrupted her.

"Thurston denies that he has ever paid attention to Rhona ; he declares that at times he has been barely civil to her, and that though he could not dislike any one so amiable and inoffensive, that he would rather remain single all his life than marry her." But I was speaking to deaf ears ; she only reiterated her final decision—Thurston must give way ; if he refused to

marry Rhona, and persisted in his mad infatuation for Sydney, she would have nothing more to do with him ; he might draw his next quarter's allowance, but that was the last penny of her money that he would ever spend.'

'Dear mother, what is to be done?'

'That is what I have been asking myself ever since I left St. Helen's Towers. Sydney is my adopted daughter, and I am anxious and willing to do all I can for her, but I have only a moderate income, Githa—just sufficient for my comfort ; the few hundreds that I have been able to put away for her would be of little use in facilitating such a marriage. Sydney was wise to refuse him unconditionally, for I could not countenance an engagement between them.'

I felt that my mother was right and told her so without hesitation, and she brightened up in a wonderful manner.

'My heart is on their side, Githa. I am very fond of Thurston ; he is a dear fellow, though somewhat reckless and even hasty. Well, while things are in this state I certainly do not think Sydney ought to remain at Bayfield. I cannot myself leave home.'

'Then you do not intend going away in August?'

I observed.

She hesitated and looked at me a little wistfully. 'Not this year. The fact is, dear, I cannot well afford it ; one of my investments has gone wrong, and this rather adds to the complication ; but for that I could have taken Sydney to the Lakes.'

'Yes, and I could have joined you there.'

'Do you really mean that, darling?' and mother's eyes were wonderfully soft ; 'how delightful that would

have been ! Do not tempt me, dear one ; I ought not to afford it.'

I hardly knew how to answer this. I was quite aware—for Aunt Cosie had told me so—that my mother had refused to accept the handsome maintenance offered to her by father, and lived entirely on her own income, which was not a large one ; but she was an excellent manager. Prior's Cot was her own freehold property—a handsome legacy from an uncle had enabled her to purchase it—and with care and economy she had sufficient to live comfortably—even luxuriously, and I had never to my knowledge heard her hint that she could not afford anything.

'Mr. Symonds says things will right themselves after a time,' she continued, putting a good face on the matter, but all the same I saw it troubled her. I knew father would have paid my expenses gladly, but I had not the courage to say so. I was too much afraid of the way in which she would draw herself up ; such a proposal would only displease her.

'I am very sorry,' I murmured ; 'but of course I shall come to you as usual in August ; and, mother dear, I think I can help you out of your difficulty, but it was father's thought, not mine. Let Sydney come back with me, and we will keep her as long as you like. Father says she will be quite safe with us.'

Mother looked at me almost gratefully.

'Thank you, Githa. After all, I believe that will be the best plan, and perhaps something else can be arranged later'; then in rather a constrained tone, 'Will you thank your father for his kind thought?' And so the matter was settled. I was to stay until Thursday, and Sydney was to return with me and stay at St. Olave's Lodge at all events until the end of

July ; it would all depend upon circumstances whether she was to be allowed to accompany me to Bayfield at the beginning of August. Mother really was extremely grateful.

'You have lifted a load off me,' she said ; 'it will be a comfort to know that Sydney will be with you, for it is too trying for the poor child to have to keep Thurston at bay. Now I hear the gate unlatched, and I expect Sydney has come back, so we may as well ring for lights.'

I thought Sydney looked tired and out of spirits ; but she seemed indisposed for talk, and wished me good-night at the door of my room, which was quite contrary to her usual habit. But when my mother came in for another look at me, she told me that poor Sydney had had a very trying evening.

Thurston had been there, and had kept close to her all the time ; and though he had found no opportunity of saying what he wanted, the consciousness of his presence made her nervous. When she left, he had followed her and begged her to send Rebecca back, but she had refused to do this. He looked hurt and disconcerted by her unexpected firmness, and they had walked back to Prior's Cot almost in silence.

'Poor Sydney had a good cry over it,' went on my mother ; 'she does so hate to give him pain, and she is sure he was much hurt with her. I am only too thankful that she is going away on Thursday, for Thurston has no right to persecute her in this way ; he is behaving like an undisciplined boy.' But though mother said this in rather a severe tone, I knew that her heart was very soft and full of sympathy for the unfortunate young lover.

CHAPTER XXX

' THEN I WILL COME '

Every to-morrow has two handles : we can take hold of the handle of anxiety or the handle of faith.—ANON.

Peace in this life springs from acquiescence even in disagreeable things, not in an exemption from bearing them.—FÉNELON.

SYDNEY had to go to the school the next morning, and she asked me to walk across the green with her. I saw mother look at me in rather a significant way, but I scarcely needed the hint. I had the presence of mind, too, to restrain a surprised exclamation when Sydney requested me to be ready half an hour earlier than usual. Her reason was soon made plain to me, when on my return I saw Thurston hanging about the lane with his dogs. He looked decidedly crestfallen at seeing me alone ; indeed he did not attempt to disguise his errand.

' Surely Sydney has gone to the school much earlier than usual ? ' he asked rather abruptly as he shook hands. ' As I came down the road the children were running across the green, and the bell was still ringing. '

Thurston's question rather confused me, but he did not seem to expect any answer. He asked me the

next minute to walk on a little with him—'that is, if you could spare a quarter of an hour, Githa'; for we had resumed our old friendly ways, and called each other by our Christian names—'Miss Darnell' and 'Mr. Wilde' never came quite naturally to us.

I was sorry to see the lines of worry on my old playmate's face; it looked haggard and a little drawn.

'You know all about things,' he began at once, as we strolled in the direction of the Feltham Road, where I had encountered Mr. Carlyon, and as I nodded, he continued: 'I am in a regular fix at the present moment. Gran can't open her lips to me without flying into a rage, and Colonel Etheridge cut me in the church porch on Sunday. I know Rhona was going to speak to me, but he pulled her away, poor little thing.'

'I am afraid from what mother told me that the Etheridges think that you have treated Rhona rather badly.'

I expected Thurston to contradict me quite fiercely, but to my surprise he only looked at me in rather a dejected manner.

'I begin to think that I have acted rather shabbily,' he returned gloomily; 'but I meant no harm. They say all is fair in love and war; but if I went to the Mount in the hope of seeing Sydney, I certainly never made love to Rhona; and yet Gran and Colonel Etheridge declare that I have jilted her.'

'I am quite sure Rhona would not say so.'

'No, and that is why they will not allow her to speak to me; she is so unselfish and forgiving that I know she would take our parts. Poor girl, I should like to explain things to her, but they won't give me a chance.'

I could not help thinking that perhaps the

Etheridges were wise in breaking off all communication for the present. Rhona was certainly in love with Thurston, and he was undoubtedly to blame for this.

Evil is wrought by want of thought,
As well as want of heart.

And though Thurston was a good, kind-hearted fellow, he had certainly done much to wreck poor Rhona's happiness.

I was rather relieved to know that they were not likely to meet just now. Rhona had so little dignity, and was so lacking in backbone, that it was probable that she would have betrayed herself—with all her gentleness and goodness her character was anæmic. Her parents knew this, and would watch over her like dragons. I could see that Thurston's conscience was very uneasy on the subject of Rhona, but his other troubles loomed larger still in the horizon, and then he commenced pouring out his griefs to me.

Sydney had confessed that she cared for him, and yet she had refused him, and declined to enter into any engagement. 'She is avoiding me, and treating me as though I were committing a crime in loving her,' went on the poor fellow, 'but she will soon find out whose will is the strongest.'

'I do not think Sydney can well do otherwise,' I returned; 'if she cares for you, she will certainly refuse to injure your prospects.'

'I have no prospects,' he replied gloomily; 'if I do not accept Gran's conditions I shall be practically a beggar.'

'Oh, Thurston!' I exclaimed at this; 'it does sound so terrible. What will you do?'

'Trust in Providence and do my level best,' was his answer; but I liked his manly air as he said it.

'Gran thinks she will frighten and starve me into accepting her terms. If I consent to marry Rhona I shall be a rich man, and have an easy life; but'—lifting his handsome head with the gesture of a young prince—'I prefer to marry the girl I love and to work for her.'

'But what work can you do, Thurston?' And at this practical question his face fell again.

'Ah, that is just the difficulty. I am willing to work if I can only find some suitable employment. This is just the point on which I think you can advise me.'

'I! What can you mean, Thurston? I have no experience at all.'

'No, but you have plenty of common sense, and you are so good-natured that you would be glad to help "a lame dog over a stile." I wanted to ask you if you thought I might consult your father on this point. I have always found him so kind and friendly, that I am sure he would give me sound advice.'

I was charmed with this idea, and told Thurston so without a moment's hesitation, and he seemed quite relieved.

'It is the best thing you could possibly do,' I went on. 'Father is so clear-headed and practical, and he is always so ready to help people; he never minds how much trouble he takes.'

'Then I should not be taking a liberty or presuming on a short acquaintance?' he asked anxiously; but I cut him short.

'What nonsense, Thurston! but then you don't know father as well as I do. If you take my advice, you will lose no time—why not go to-morrow? and I will write and say you are coming.'

Wednesday is rather a good day, for father is often home quite early in the afternoon.' Thurston seemed pleased with my suggestion. He said he would sleep in town, and call at St. Olave's Lodge about four, and if father had not returned, he would wait for him. I was quite sure in my own mind that father would keep him to dinner, and very probably offer him a bed. I knew how interested he was in him and Sydney, and he would do his very best for them both. I would give father a hint that Thurston must not come to St. Olave's Lodge while Sydney was with us.

Thurston looked at his watch when we had settled this arrangement to our satisfaction, and then he excused himself rather hurriedly. 'You have been awfully good to me, Githa, and I am very grateful, but I must not talk any more. I must take the dogs back and make my way to the station, for I am to have luncheon with two fellows at Henley'; and then he shook hands and rushed off like a whirlwind. I felt very sorry for Sydney as I followed Thurston more slowly down the road. How could she help loving such a fine-hearted, chivalrous young fellow! Somehow with all his faults I never thought so highly of my old playmate as I did that morning. Thurston had hardly disappeared from sight before I encountered another friend, for not far from the place where I had seen him last, was Mr. Carlyon, talking to an old shepherd beside a gate. He saw me coming, and broke off his talk a little abruptly. He seemed much surprised at seeing me.

'I had no idea you were in Bayfield,' he observed; but I thought he looked pleased. 'You appear to haunt the Feltham Road, Miss Darnell. Young Wilde passed me just now with his dogs; he seemed in a tremendous hurry, for he would not stop to speak.'

'He has to catch the train for Henley,' was my reply; 'he is lunching with some friends there.'

I thought Mr. Carlyon gave me rather a searching look, but he only said: 'I hope you have come to stay for some little time; your last visit was very brief.'

'No, indeed; I am going back on Thursday, and Miss Herbert will accompany me.' And then I said a little awkwardly: 'I was sorry not to see you before I left, but I hope Stella gave you my message.'

'Oh yes, I had it all right'; but I fancied Mr. Carlyon bit his lip to conceal a smile.

'Stella is a shrewd little person, only her imagination sometimes runs away with her'; and I wondered vaguely what he meant by that.

'I hope she and Cyril are quite well.'

'Perfectly so, thank you; to judge from their appetites at breakfast. I understand from Peace they beat the record; perhaps that was the reason why they insisted on saying their grace three times over. "We always does it when we has sausages," Stella informed me, "and we always have sausages on Peace's birthday. Peace is such a great age—she is nearly an old woman." To the best of my knowledge I believe that Peace is thirty-five.'

I could not help laughing at his droll manner. He always revelled in Stella's queer speeches; but to my surprise he grew suddenly grave again.

'Do you know poor old Peggy Knowles went Home last night?' he observed. 'That was her brother Patrick to whom I was talking. He is shepherd at the Upland Farm.'

'Were you with her when she died, Mr. Carlyon?'

'Yes, a neighbour of hers fetched me. It was a

very peaceful passing. I think'—very quietly—'our Lord is especially tender to his old tired-out children, and that the angels are charged to take them very gently through the dark valley.'

'I hope so,' was my answer; but to my surprise an unusual smile came to his lips.

'Peggy's thoughts were full of her cottage. Not long before the end, when she was fairly sensible, and I had been saying a prayer or two, she laid her wrinkled old hand on mine.

"It will be fine to see Steeve sitting in the chimney-corner, warming his hands in the old way, and maybe as we sit there together, so peaceful like, we shall hear the Master lift the latch, and then—oh, the dear beautiful Face!" These were her last words. A little later she fell asleep, and no one knew the moment of passing.'

I was glad to hear this—it seemed to me so touching; and I was glad to think also that Mr. Carlyon was with her to the last. When I knew him better he told me that he always liked to be with his dying people, and that he had more than once given out publicly that he would willingly go to them night or day. In many respects he was an ideal parson, and the people very soon found this out for themselves.

As we passed the bench where we had sat that day Mr. Carlyon paused, and then asked if I would not like to rest for a few minutes; 'for,' he continued frankly, 'you have no idea how tired you look.' And I accepted the suggestion gratefully.

I was a little startled, however, when the next moment he began talking about Thurston, and then he told me that he had called at St. Helen's Towers, and had heard Lady Wilde's version of the trouble. She had begged him to use his influence with her grandson,

and he had sent Thurston a note asking him to dine with him that evening. 'We had a long talk, and as I know from Mrs. Darnell that you are fully aware of the state of things, I see no harm in telling you that my opinions veered round to quite another point of the compass, and I shall be obliged to tell Lady Wilde that I must decline to use my influence in the way she suggests.'

'Do you mean that you are on Thurston's side?'

'Most certainly, although, as I told him with perfect frankness, his conduct to Miss Etheridge had not been generous; but with that exception I sympathise with him very strongly. My next visit to St. Helen's Towers will not be a pleasant one, but I shall certainly speak my mind to Lady Wilde.'

'Then she will quarrel with you as she has with mother, and I am afraid she and the Etheridges will make things very uncomfortable for you.'

'I should not be surprised if you are right,' he returned coolly, 'but all the same I must do my duty. The whole thing is monstrous; every man has a right to choose a wife for himself. In my opinion, Thurston Wilde has made an excellent choice. Miss Herbert is one of my best workers. I think most highly of her, and he is a lucky fellow who gets her. When Wilde told me that he meant to take his grandmother at her word and to look out for work without delay, I clapped him on the shoulder and called him a brave fellow; for, let me tell you, Miss Darnell,' he continued seriously, 'it is no slight sacrifice that he is making. He is giving up wealth, position, and the life congenial to his tastes for the sake of the girl he loves.'

I was so pleased to hear him speak of Thurston in this appreciative way that I could not forbear telling

him about our conversation. He was extremely interested, and said at once that it seemed an excellent suggestion.

'I do not know Mr. Darnell personally,' he observed, 'but from what you tell me, he will probably be of the greatest assistance to Wilde. It is my private opinion that if he has plenty of backbone and shows his determination to set to work at once, that Lady Wilde may in time be brought to reason ; but of course that remains to be proved.'

We talked a little more on this subject. Mr. Carlyon told me that he was very pleased that Miss Herbert was to pay us a long visit. 'You will do each other good,' he observed, in such a kind way, and then he asked me a little abruptly when I intended to come down for a longer visit. It struck me that he waited rather anxiously for my answer, for when I announced my intention of coming down for August he looked quite sorry.

'There!' he observed in a regretful tone ; 'I had an inward conviction that you would tell me that.'

'Are you going away?' I stammered ; and I hope I did not look as disappointed as I felt.

'Yes,' he returned rather gravely. 'I am sorry to say that I shall be away the whole of August. The old college friend who generally acts as my *locum tenens* can only come then, besides which I am pledged to another friend to go with him to the Austrian Tyrol.'

'And the children?'

'Oh, Peace will take them to Binstead. She has a mother and brother living there ; they have a small farm, and are very decent, respectable people, and they have two rooms to let. The children fairly revel in all the animal life on the farm—chickens, ducks, and

young pigs. Peace envelops the children in blue overalls, and they run wild from morning to night.'

I had to say that this was an excellent arrangement, but I am afraid my remarks sounded a little flat. I could hardly conceal my intense disappointment. The Vicarage tenanted by strangers; no heavenly-minded twins playing funerals and angels in the churchyard; no grinning Golliwog in a red tie hanging limply over a tombstone.

It seemed to me that Bayfield would be almost deserted. The Etheridges and Lady Wilde were generally away in August; there would be no Thurston to take us on the river, and probably Sydney would be absent. I should be alone with mother.

'Things will go crookedly in this world,' went on Mr. Carlyon, but his cheerful tone seemed a little forced. 'I am really very sorry to miss your summer visit, but probably you and Mrs. Darnell will go away too.'

'I do not think so. I believe mother means to stay at Prior's Cot this year.' Something in my tone seemed to strike him, for he turned and looked at me in a singularly penetrating manner.

'Perhaps good may come out of this,' he observed quietly. 'Your very dependence on each other for society may draw you and your mother more closely together'; but I made no answer to this.

'You must not lose heart,' he continued very gently. 'Things will not come right in a hurry, and, my dear Miss Darnell, your work is rather a difficult one. Let me give you a bit of advice; it is not original, but there is much wisdom in it: "Never bear more than one trouble at a time. Some people bear three kinds—all they ever had, all they have now, and all they

expect to have." Things may straighten out better than you think.'

'I wish I could feel more hopeful, Mr. Carlyon.'

Then he smiled and took my hand, for we were at the entrance of the lane, and I could see Sydney crossing the little goose green. 'Now, as I have a child's funeral at twelve, I must bid you good-bye.'

'It will be good-bye for a long time,' I returned, trying to smile.

'Oh no, I hope not. Perhaps, if you give me leave, I will do myself the pleasure of calling at St. Olave's Lodge. I should like to make Mr. Darnell's acquaintance.'

'I am sure father will be very pleased to see you,' I returned a little shyly, for he was looking at me so intently that I felt rather confused; 'and,' fearing I had been a little ungracious, 'I shall be very pleased, too.'

'Then I will come,' was all he said, and after that we shook hands, and he went quickly in the direction of the church, while I waited in a shady corner for Sydney to join me.

CHAPTER XXXI

THURSTON OBTAINS A BERTH

We ask for heroic duties, but the duties that lie to our hand are heroic. The so-called heroic occurrences are, after all, often easier, and therefore less heroic than the common-place trials that daily test the stuff of which we are made.—HUGH BLANE.

There is a comfort in the strength of love ; 'twill make a thing endurable, which else would overset the brain, or break the heart.

WORDSWORTH.

I THOUGHT it better to have no reserves with Sydney, so I told her about my talk with Thurston. She made no remark until I mentioned his intention to consult father about work ; then she grew very pale.

'That looks as though he means to give up everything,' she observed sorrowfully.

'Of course he means to give up everything,' I returned indignantly. 'Did you think he was only playing with you, Sydney, when he asked you to marry him?'

'Oh no ; I never thought that.'

'You could hardly make such a mistake as that,' was my reply ; 'no man could be more in earnest than Thurston ! He is not only giving up home and wealth, and most of the things a young man prizes, but he actually glories in his self-sacrifice. He is like one of

the knights of old, Sydney : he is going into the lists to wage war for his liege lady.'

This little rhapsody seemed to touch her.

'But he will be so dreadfully poor,' she observed, after a moment's consideration; 'he has not been brought up with the idea of working for his living, and he will have so much to learn, and beginners earn so very little'; for Sydney was none the less practical for being in love. She looked so cast down and unhappy on Thurston's account, that I had to cheer her up.

'Thurston is really clever—he will not always be a beginner—and I expect father will be able to help him; he took a fancy to Thurston from the very first, and he knows so many people, and can give him such valuable introductions'; and Sydney seemed a little comforted. But it struck me then, as it did afterwards, how little she thought of herself and her own trouble in comparison with his; it was no mere figure of speech to say that she was perfectly ready to efface herself if it would be for his advantage and happiness.

'I believe you would not lift a finger to prevent his marrying Rhona,' I said, rather reproachfully, to her one day; but she did not try to defend herself.

'If marrying Rhona would ensure his happiness, you are undoubtedly right, Githa,' she replied. 'Thurston's well-being and peace of mind must always come first with me, but I cannot bring myself to believe that she would ever satisfy him.'

'That shows your good sense,' was my answer; but she only sighed and looked at me thoughtfully. 'If only I could be sure that he will not miss the old life too much, and that he could be content with a little—no, do not smile, Githa; if ever you care for any one as I care for Thurston, you will know what I mean—

and how his happiness is a thousand times dearer to me than my own.'

I wish Thurston could have heard her. Sydney looked quite beautiful at that moment, and there was such an earnest ring in her voice, I felt rather ashamed of my petulance and impatience.

'If I cared for any one as you care for Thurston,' I said slowly, 'I think I should feel as you do, Sydney'; but here a sudden catching in my throat checked me—'if I cared for somebody!' How strange that Sydney should say that.

I think mother was pleased to know that Thurston wished to consult father; not that she said so, but her manner gave me that impression.

'Your father is a very good business man,' she said quietly, 'and he has much experience and a great many friends'; and then she begged me not to encourage Thurston's visits while Sydney was at St. Olave's Lodge. 'I think it would be far better for them to see as little as possible of each other for the present,' she continued. 'Thurston must test his feelings, and Sydney must have time to make up her mind whether Thurston is necessary to her happiness.' And as I knew father would agree with her, I did not dispute this; but I asked mother to tell me all she could find out about Rhona.

'That will be very little, I expect, Githa'; and I found to my regret that she was right.

Mother drove to the station with us the next day. I could see that Sydney was much depressed, though she tried hard to hide it. She did not like leaving home again so soon; her attachment to her adopted mother was very real and deep; she not only loved her, but she believed in her implicitly.

She told me once quite seriously—for Sydney never gushed—that she thought her Aunt Yvonne as near perfection as a woman could be. ‘She is beautiful in person and mind and character,’ she went on; ‘her ideals are higher than other people’s, and this often makes her unhappy. I think even you, Githa, hardly know how good she is.’ This speech rather wounded me, but I let it pass. I knew Sydney could see no fault in her second mother, and that in her honest heart she believed every word she said, and I almost envied her.

We had taken an earlier train than usual, and father was not at home when we arrived, so I took Sydney to her room and left her to unpack and settle in, while I had a chat with Mardie. I found out from her that Thurston had slept there, and that he and father had gone out together directly after breakfast.

‘And they sat up late, too,’ she went on. ‘It chimed the half-hour after one before they were in their rooms, so they must have found a deal to say to each other; but the master’s voice sounded quite cheerful when he wished Mr. Wilde good-night.’

We heard father drive up at this moment, and I ran down to see him. He greeted me in his loving way, asked after Sydney, and then drew me into the library, saying he would be glad to have a talk with me alone; and then he recapitulated all that Mardie had just told me—Thurston had dined and slept there, and they had sat up late talking over things.

‘I think Thurston Wilde is a fine, manly young fellow,’ he continued. ‘He has plenty of pluck and determination, and is ready to put his shoulder to the wheel, and I mean to help him to the best of my power. As he seems to be a fair accountant, and is rather fond

of figures, I propose to take him into the Bank. There is a vacancy just now, since young Tillotson had to give up. I need not say that he accepted my offer.'

'Oh, father, how good of you! and Thurston knows nothing about business.'

'I daresay not, but he has a head on his shoulders and can learn, and I am quite sure that he will do his best. I daresay he will not earn his salary at first. I had a talk with our manager, and he has promised to keep an eye on him; and Jem Beresford—you remember him, Gipsy—that good-looking young fellow who used to come down when I was laid up with a sprained ankle'; and as I nodded, 'Well, Jem is going to coach him a bit.'

'What salary shall you give him, father?' Then I noticed father hesitated.

'Well, I am not doing quite the usual thing, but he is to start with a hundred a year. I don't suppose his work will be worth much for the first few months until he has mastered some of the details; but, as I told Macdonald, I will put up with that.'

'Wasn't Thurston very grateful, father?'

'I never saw any one more so; and he expressed himself very properly. Oh, there is another thing, Gipsy. As he means to begin work next week, I was anxious to find him decent lodgings, and Beresford helped me there. You know Jem's father was a country vicar, but since his death his mother and sister have had hard work to make ends meet. They have a house in Gresham Terrace, and Jem says they could let Wilde have two fairly comfortable rooms. Don't you think that a good plan?'

'It is perfectly splendid; but, father, Gresham Terrace is close to Chelsea Hospital; that will be rather near when Sydney is with us!'

Father gave a low whistle of dismay. 'Then we shall have to send her back to Bayfield, for Thurston Wilde has quite decided to take the rooms. I invited Jem to join us at luncheon, and then we went round to Gresham Terrace, and were introduced to Mrs. Beresford and her daughter. She is quite a gentlewoman, Gipsy—a nice, quiet little woman, very gentle in manner; and Miss Caroline is a pleasant, good-natured looking person. I should say that she is half a dozen years older than Jem; she is a daily governess, I believe. I thought it would be nice for you to have an old friend settled near us, and then we can show him little attentions—ask him to dinner, or offer him a seat at the theatre—for I am afraid he will be a bit dull at first.'

I gave father a grateful and appreciative hug. I knew how generous he had been, and how he had planned for Thurston's comfort. It would be far better for Thurston to be near us—we could cheer him up in a hundred ways—and when Sydney had gone back to Bayfield, St. Olave's Lodge could be a second home to him.

I asked father presently what Thurston would do with his dogs. Ben, the bull-terrier, was absolutely devoted to his master, and so was Laddie, the beautiful red-brown setter. To my surprise he told me that the Beresfords had no objection to dogs, and that Ben would be allowed to take up his quarters there; and that Mr. Carlyon, who was a great admirer of Laddie, had offered him a home at the Vicarage. He was a gentle, affectionate creature, and all children loved him, and he would have his freedom at Bayfield. London was clearly impossible for Laddie under the present circumstances. Father went on to say that Thurston

intended to make the break at once, and to come up to town the following week.

'St. Helen's Towers is not a very bright abode just now, Gipsy. Wilde tells me that his grandmother has sent him to Coventry, and never speaks except to quarrel with him. He is going to leave some of his things at the Vicarage, but he will bring his books and bicycle. Poor fellow, it is not a pleasant bit of business, and I can see that he feels it much. I think in his way he is rather attached to the old woman'; and I knew this was the truth. Up to the present time his grandmother had indulged and petted him; she had encouraged him in his love of comfort and luxury, and had brought him up to believe that at her death he would be a rich man. 'Gran has been awfully good to me.' How often I have heard Thurston say that.

Hallett brought in tea, and then Sydney came down. Father was very kind to her. I think he noticed that she was rather depressed. He told her that he must get a safe animal for her to ride, and Sydney brightened up at this, for she dearly loved riding.

I had no opportunity of talking to her about Thurston until father had left the house the next morning, and then we sat on the balcony and I told her everything.

She seemed profoundly grateful to father, and said such nice things about him; but I could see the idea of the Bank made her miserable.

'Oh, poor Thurston!' she said, in such a distressed voice; 'and to think it is all my fault, Githa—not that I could help his falling in love with me. But if Aunt Yvonne had not given me a home, all this would not have happened.'

This was so unlike Sydney, that I stared at her

aghast. 'I don't see that it is any fault of yours,' I remarked presently.

'No; but one is so ready to blame oneself when things go crookedly, and it does make me so unhappy, Githa, to see how I am spoiling Thurston's life'; and here she quite broke down.

'How will he bear the confinement and drudgery after all those years of freedom—adding up figures instead of shooting and boating, and wandering through the woods with his dogs? He used to enjoy every moment of the day, though people did say he had a dull life for a young man; but though he often grumbled, and said he hated being tied so closely to his grandmother's apron-strings, he could not deny that she was good to him; but now, oh, Githa'; and Sydney's eyes filled again with tears.

Of course I tried to cheer her up as much as possible. I told her how lucky Thurston was to find such comfortable quarters.

'The Beresfords are gentle-people though they are poor,' I observed; 'and Jem Beresford will be such a nice companion for Thurston, and then he will have Ben with him—it would have broken his heart to part with Ben—and Mr. Carlyon has promised to give Laddie a home.'

'Every one is very kind'; but she still spoke in a dejected voice.

'When you are gone, Sydney,' I went on cheerfully, 'Thurston can come here as often as he likes, and we mean to be good to him.'

'That is very sweet of you, Githa.'

'You need not think he is going to lead such a dull life after all,' I went on. 'We shall take him to the theatre or opera, and invite him when we have

nice people coming. As for drudgery and confinement : if Thurston had no motive for his work, you might pity him as much as you please ; but you forget for whom he is working and of whom he will be thinking as he sits at his desk.' And then I saw by her blush that I had touched the right chord at last. "To make an end of Selfishness is Happiness," I quoted presently. "This is the greatest happiness—to subdue the selfish thought of 'I.'" This is the teaching of Buddha.' And then as Sydney seemed properly impressed with the sentiment, the conversation became more cheerful.

She confessed that things might have been far worse for Thurston. He would be settled comfortably near friends, and would have sufficient for his maintenance, and if they could not meet, they could at least have the happiness of hearing of each other. 'I know how good you will be to poor Thurston,' she went on, 'and how you will tell me about him in your letters'; and of course I promised to do this.

Sydney seemed more cheerful after this conversation, though she was still a little thoughtful and abstracted at times.

Father lost no time in procuring a horse for her use, and we either rode with him before breakfast or in the late afternoon ; and these rides gave Sydney much enjoyment. I noticed that she wrote to mother almost daily, and as I was now in the habit of writing twice a week, she was kept well informed of our movements.

Her letters in reply were full of interest to us. Thurston had called at Prior's Cot to bid good-bye ; he was in better spirits and seemed determined to put a good face on things, though he evidently realised his position keenly. He told her that his

grandmother was fretting herself ill, that she scarcely ever spoke to him, and that meals were taken in gloomy silence, and that he spent a good deal of his time at the Vicarage.

'He is exceedingly grateful to your father, Githa,' she wrote, 'and thinks most highly of his opinion. Mr. Carlyon came in directly Thurston had left, and we had a long talk; he agreed with me that nothing can be better than the arrangement with the Beresfords, and his being so near St. Olave's Lodge will be a great resource to him.

'Of course, there will be nothing to prevent Sydney coming back with you in August. I know for certain that the Etheridges are going to Cornwall, and in all probability Lady Wilde will be away; indeed, I am afraid you will have a dull visit'; but I refused to endorse this.

CHAPTER XXXII

AT THE SCHOOL OF ART NEEDLEWORK

Comfort one another with the hand-clasp close and tender,
With the sweetness love can render,
And the looks of friendly eyes.
Do not wait with grace unspoken
While life's daily bread is broken,
Gentle speech is oft like manna from the skies.

M. E. SANGSTER.

THE next event was Miss Redford's wedding. Father had received an invitation, but had excused himself, on the plea of business, from going to the church, though he promised to look in at the reception and take me home. I thought this was very good of him, for I knew he hated weddings, but he was anxious to show his respect to Miss Redford. The Burfords had arranged everything very nicely and in good taste, and I never saw Reddy look so handsome; her grey dress and hat just suited her, and she wore some fine old lace, at her throat and wrists, which had belonged to her mother; she really looked quite distinguished as she walked up the aisle on Dr. Burford's arm.

Everything went off well; and as father and I drove home, we agreed that we had never seen a happier couple.

'Happiness is a great beautifier, Gipsy,' he observed;

'Mrs. Pelham will be a younger woman than Miss Redford ever was'; and then he patted my hand in his kind way. 'You looked like a bride yourself in your white chiffon; it is a very pretty frock, little girl, and quite worthy of the wearer.' I blushed with pleasure at his evident admiration. I did so love father to notice things. I had taken a great deal of pains with my appearance, for I wanted Reddy and Helen to be pleased. Sydney had been greatly impressed—'You are really quite like a dream, Githa; your frock is perfectly sweet, and so are those Mal-maison pinks,' with an admiring glance at my shower bouquet. But for all their loving praise my heart was sad as I listened to the solemn words of the marriage service.

'For better, for worse,'—no wonder father hated weddings; how could he have borne to listen to those words! It was at such moments I envied Sydney for her absolute loyalty to my mother: I who was her own child doubted and criticised, but Sydney's warm heart had nothing but love and tenderness for her adopted mother.

I knew from father that Thurston had taken up his residence in Gresham Terrace and had begun work at the Bank; it was therefore not surprising when one morning as we were riding home to a late breakfast we overtook him strolling along the Embankment with Ben at his heels. His eyes were fixed on St. Olave's Lodge, but at the sound of our horses' hoofs he turned, and Sydney, who was nearest him, reined in her horse.

Thurston looked rather pale, but there was a flash of joy in his eyes as Sydney held out her hand to him. As usual, she was perfectly natural and simple.

'We have had such a lovely ride, Thurston, and

such a canter in Rotten Row! Is not Mamzelle a pretty creature! and she goes so beautifully too, almost as well as Bab. Oh, there is dear old Ben—see, he recognises us, Githa.'

I did not hear Thurston's reply, for at that moment Bab began dancing in an absurd way. We were only a few yards from St. Olave's Lodge, and she was impatient for her sugar. Father was absorbed in watching us. And so Thurston got his innings; for when at last Bab consented to leave her four feet on the ground again, I saw Thurston still leaning against Mamzelle's glossy brown flank, and talking in a low, intent voice to Sydney.

'Come, young ladies,' observed father in a loud, peremptory voice, 'if I am to have any breakfast at all we must go in at once. I am sorry I can't ask you to join us, Wilde; but I expect you have had yours long ago,' and Thurston flushed a little as he assented to this. Of course, he knew why father would not invite him to St. Olave's Lodge.

Sydney was very silent during breakfast, but when we were alone together she confessed that the unexpected meeting had made them both very happy.

'Thurston said so more than once,' she observed, with a pretty blush. He was just walking past the house, but he never expected to see any one. Do you know, Githa, he and Ben were walking up and down the Embankment for such a time last night, until all the windows were dark. He seemed quite disappointed when he heard I slept at the back of the house.'

I would not have smiled for the world as she said this; her young lover's devotion was evidently a wonderful and beautiful thing in Sydney's eyes. The remembrance of that meeting made her happy for

days. And I quite understood the reason why she always stood so long on the balcony before we retired to bed ; I knew she was straining her eyes in the darkness to catch sight of a tall, slim figure, and a small white body revolving round it. Of course, I never asked any questions, but I certainly saw her wave her handkerchief one evening, and there was a little satisfied smile on her lips when she came back to us. I never could find out if father was aware of these little episodes, but he certainly took no notice.

It was shortly after this that I had an unexpected encounter. Mother had asked Sydney to do a little commission for her at the Kensington School of Art Needlework, so we drove there one afternoon. The young lady who waited on us found some difficulty in matching the silks, so I left them and wandered into an inner room where there were some fine old cabinets and carved cupboards. I was just examining one when I heard my name pronounced, and turning hastily I found myself face to face with Rhona.

'Oh, Githa,' she said in an agitated voice, 'I saw you and Sydney pass just now, but I was behind the screen and you neither of you noticed me.'

'Are you alone, Rhona ?'

'Hush, don't speak so loudly—no, of course not. Aunt Laura is in the room next to this. She is buying a fire-screen ; but she never can make up her mind quickly, so I said I was tired and would sit down. There is plenty of room for you on this bench, Githa, and I do so want to speak to you.'

I looked at her pityingly as I sat down. No one would say that Rhona looked almost pretty now : her face seemed smaller and more insignificant, and her colouring more washed out ; her blue eyes had lost

their soft brightness ; she looked languid and fatigued and far from strong.

‘ I thought you were all going to Cornwall, Rhona ? ’

‘ Not for another three weeks,’ she returned listlessly. ‘ I have only come up with Aunt Laura for a day or two’s shopping. I tried to get out of it, but mother said it would do me good ’ ; and Rhona sighed in an oppressed way. As usual, she had to submit to the will of others ; even her mother, who loved her devotedly, treated her like a child.

‘ I am going down to Bayfield for August, Rhona.’

‘ Yes, I suppose so ; that will be nice for Sydney ’ ; then her voice changing to earnestness, ‘ Githa, dear, I have been so longing to see one of you ; I wanted to speak to you, but I never could find an opportunity. I tried once to say something to Thurston, and here a faint colour suffused her face ; ‘ but father came between us and I had to give it up.’

I nodded, for I had heard this before.

‘ Oh, they are so unjust to him,’ she went on. ‘ Father storms and rages if any one mentions his name ; he says such cruel things about him sometimes, and once he sent me out of the room because I cried and said he was too hard on him.’

‘ Poor Rhona,’ I observed pityingly, for I knew that she was not exaggerating matters. I was too well aware of the Colonel’s choleric and imperious temper ; he would resent fiercely the slight to his daughter. Rhona’s home life would certainly be far from comfortable under the present circumstances.

‘ I cannot bear them to say such things,’ she continued, clasping and unclasping her hands in a helpless sort of way. ‘ If he made mistakes, I know he never meant to be unkind.’

'But, Rhona dear, we all, even Sydney, think that Thurston has acted very wrongly. I am sure that he thinks so himself and is very, very sorry. He had no right to make you think that he was in love with you, when all the time it was Sydney.'

'He did not mean to be unkind,' she reiterated in a distressed voice; 'and after all I was more to blame than he. I wanted to believe it, and I tried to shut my eyes and not notice things,' and here the poor child drooped her head. 'I ought not to have imagined for a moment that he could care for me when Sydney was so sweet and engaging—how could he help loving her!—and yet they all treat him as though he had committed a crime.'

'But, Rhona, if he has made you unhappy'—then the tears started to her eyes.

'It is my own fault,' she whispered. 'I ought not to have let myself care for him until I was sure, and I deserve to suffer for my foolishness. Mother says a girl ought not to give herself away until a man tells her that he loves her, but,' with a heartbreaking little smile, 'I don't see how one is to help it.'

Neither did I, but I would not say so to Rhona.

'He was so kind to me,' she went on, 'kinder than any one I ever knew; but I have been thinking things over, and I see now that he only meant to be brotherly, and that his manner was quite different to Sydney. I think he liked me in a way, as though I were a little sister; he used to tell me things and try to help me.'

'I am quite sure he was fond of you, Rhona.'

'Yes, and I did so long to say a comforting word to him, and to tell him how sorry I was for all this trouble. Githa, dear, would you give him a message—would you tell him how grieved I am that his grand-

mother should treat him so unkindly, and that I never have and never shall blame him, and that I shall pray for his happiness with all my heart,—will you tell him this?’ Then I assured her very gravely that Thurston should have her message.

She gave me a grateful kiss and hurried on. ‘And dear Sydney, give her my love, and tell her that she must be good to him and not keep him long waiting for his answer. Something tells me that she has refused him. I can hear nothing, but if she has done this, it is very wrong, for Thurston has given up everything for her sake.’

I told Rhona quietly that her surmise had been correct, that Sydney had refused him, as she was unwilling to accept such a sacrifice, but that no one had a doubt that Thurston would in time induce her to give him a different answer. She listened to me in silence, and then I went on to tell her of Thurston’s new employment and his residence in Gresham Terrace. I knew she was hungry for news, and that it was cruel to leave her in ignorance ; and again she thanked me in the most touching way.

‘You have done me good, Githa,’ she said, squeezing my hand. ‘How thankful I am that I have met you. I shall not be quite so unhappy now. Perhaps when father sees me a little brighter he may be less angry with poor Thurston ; but whatever he says, I shall never marry any one now—never—never. Hush ! I hear Aunt Laura’s voice. I will go and meet her, and perhaps, after all, she will not see you.’

I had no desire to encounter Miss Etheridge, so I slipped out just in time, for Sydney, who had finished her business, was come in search of me. She looked rather mystified when I hurried her away. The

carriage was at some little distance, and Fenwick did not see us, but as we stood with our backs to the entrance I heard Miss Etheridge's rather high-pitched voice behind us. 'Don't look round,' I whispered in Sydney's ear, and then she understood.

'Your mother will be delighted with the screen, Rhona,' she was saying; 'it is a perfect beauty, and not dear, in my opinion. But I was sorry to keep you so long waiting. We will have some tea now, for you are looking dreadfully pale, my love,' and here Miss Etheridge signalled a hansom.

Sydney looked at me pleadingly. 'That was Rhona. Do let us run back and speak to her.'

But I took firm hold of her arm. 'Not for worlds. We should only get Rhona into trouble. Wait until we are in the carriage and I will tell you about her'; and Sydney listened to my long story with breathless attention, and I could see that she was much touched by Rhona's message.

'How unselfish she is,' she returned. 'I think she puts us all to shame. Poor dear Rhona! If I were half as good,' and there were tears in Sydney's eyes.

It was some little time before I found an opportunity of giving Thurston her message; but one evening when I was returning from Aunt Cosie's I met him. Sydney had not accompanied me. She had a headache, and thought it better to remain at home.

Thurston turned back with me, and I told him at once about my interview with Rhona, and I could see how interested he was. 'I was quite sure that she wanted to speak to me that Sunday in the church porch,' he observed, 'only the old fellow pushed himself between us.' But when I had delivered the message, he was so silent, and there was such a pained look

on his face, that I did not like to speak. But presently he said in a low voice, 'If you ever have the opportunity, Githa, I should like you to thank Rhona for that message. It was generous and dear of her to send it. Tell her that though she has forgiven me, I shall never forgive myself,' and he seemed so upset that I thought it better to say no more.

I often wondered if Mr. Carlyon would keep his promise of calling at St. Olave's Lodge, and it was not until the middle of July that we saw him.

He came one afternoon as we were sitting with father in the drawing-room. It was an intensely hot afternoon, but there was a little breeze from the river, so I had told Hallett to bring tea there. With the zeal of a young housekeeper I had ordered iced coffee as well as tea, and father was just lecturing me playfully on my extravagance when Mr. Carlyon was announced.

To this moment I am ashamed to remember how exceedingly shy I felt. I only hoped that no one else noticed it. I could see at once that father was strongly attracted by our visitor, and somehow I never saw Mr. Carlyon to greater advantage. He was always very distinguished-looking, he carried himself so well, and there was such ease of manner and such an air of good-breeding about him, that he seldom failed to impress strangers. Father received him most cordially, when Mr. Carlyon observed pleasantly that he had been anxious to make his acquaintance. Father returned in quite a nice way that he had heard so much of him from his daughter that he could reciprocate that wish. Mr. Carlyon looked across at me with his kind smile.

'Miss Darnell and I are good friends.' Then, 'By-

the-bye, my little people have entrusted me with all sorts of messages,' and then he drew forth from his breast pocket a small parcel tied with red worsted. It proved to be a pen-wiper, in the shape of an attenuated and deformed butterfly, with 'Girlie,' worked in green floss-silk on pink flannel, and speckled all over with curious green dots. 'I hope you admire my little girl's design,' he observed. 'I believe Stella expended hours of toil over that pen-wiper. I was to explain to you that the dots are kisses, and that they are from Cyril as well as Stella.'

'Oh, the darlings!' I exclaimed, as I raised the grotesque object to my lips.

'They begged me to tell you that they intend to find you some lovely shells when they go over to Bognor. I believe Peace has promised that they are to spend a day there. There was a good deal more which has escaped my memory. They are wild with delight at the idea of going to Binstead. As Peace says in her quaint way, "They are neither to hold nor to bind until she tucks them up in bed."'

I do not know why all this talk about the twins made me feel rather dull, but I could not help owing to Mr. Carlyon how much I should miss them when I went down to Bayfield. He seemed to like to hear me say it, and then he turned to father.

'My little ones are much attached to Miss Darnell. Stella informed me yesterday that "Girlie" was the nicest big playfellow they had ever had, with the exception of your humble servant. But it was not quite kind of Stella to ignore you, Miss Herbert.'

'Oh, the children care much more for Githa,' she returned, smiling, 'but I am not jealous, Mr. Carlyon, and I have plenty of attention when Githa is absent.'

Mr. Carlyon seemed to enjoy his iced coffee, which he said was an admirable idea in hot weather; and then he and father began to talk about the Austrian Tyrol and the Passion Play that Mr. Carlyon had seen the previous year, and their talk was so interesting that Sydney and I listened with rapt attention. They had not half exhausted the subject when the dressing-bell rang, and Mr. Carlyon rose, with an exclamation at the lateness of the hour. To my surprise, and also to my great pleasure, father asked him to dine with us the following evening, that they might finish their conversation, and he accepted this invitation without the slightest hesitation.

'It is *au revoir*, then,' he said in quite a pleased voice as he shook hands with me, and I said rather shyly that I was very glad. Father went downstairs with him; but when he came up a few minutes later and found me alone, he told me that Mr. Carlyon had asked Thurston to dine with him at his hotel.

'He says he shall be glad to have a talk with me about him, so I am glad—aren't you, Gipsy?—that I asked him to dinner.' And then, pinching my cheek gently, 'I think your vicar a cut above the average. He is a gentlemanly and most agreeable man; but it is easy to see he has had trouble'; and then father begged me to hurry up or the second gong would sound.

CHAPTER XXXIII

'TITANIA'

Shall I forget on this side of the grave?
I promise nothing : you must wait and see,
Patient and brave.
(O my soul, watch with him and he with me.)

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI.

THERE is a homely old saying that new brooms sweep clean. I was very particular about the menu for the next day, and Mrs. Kennedy found it somewhat difficult to satisfy me. Indeed, she hinted that my ideas were rather extravagant. 'I would not have an ice-pudding if I were you, Miss Githa,' she observed with the familiarity of an old servant; 'there is only one gentleman coming, and it has such a company look.' But I remembered Mr. Carlyon's appreciation of the iced coffee, and carried my point.

I had rather an argument, too, with Hallett about the table decorations. He was, as usual, a little opinionative in these matters, and evidently disapproved of my scheme; but I put on what Sydney called my princess air, and was exceedingly firm, so he was obliged to give way.

Father grumbled a little because we could not ask Thurston to join us. 'There would be no harm

in inviting the lad,' he said quite testily, 'and I don't see why we are to act as Miss Herbert's jailers. When two well-conducted, sensible young people are in love with each other, there is not the slightest use in trying to keep them apart. Doesn't Shakespeare say, "Fire that is closest kept burns most of all"?' And then a wicked twinkle came into his eyes—'Oh, Gip, my dear, "More water glideth by the mill than wots the miller of." If we gave Romeo a seat at the dinner-table we should not have Juliet so often on the balcony'; and then I knew that father was not as blind as we supposed.

I ventured to hint something of this in my next letter to mother, but I found it was no use; she only reiterated her wish that there should be as little intercourse as possible. 'Of course, we cannot always avoid accidental meetings,' she went on, 'but for the present I would much rather that Thurston keeps away from St. Olave's Lodge; he is on his probation, and I want to be quite sure that he is in earnest before he has the opportunity of renewing his offer.'

Father shrugged his shoulders when I read this paragraph to him, and then he said rather a bitter thing,—

'So you tried to make your mother change her mind. You are very young, Gipsy, or you would know better.'

Of course, I took father's side in the matter; but, all the same, I knew mother was not unreasonable in the view she held, though her discipline was a little too bracing for my taste. She wanted two young creatures to be perfectly sure of themselves and of each other, and she desired their happiness and ultimate well-being so earnestly that she could not

brook the idea of any present enjoyment marring it. In her stern, Puritan creed happiness was often perfected through a certain degree of suffering and endurance. 'If they cannot bear a short period of waiting, they are acting like undisciplined children,' she said once. 'But I can trust Sydney; she has never disappointed me yet.'

I am quite sure that Sydney tried to carry out mother's wishes most loyally, and that it never struck her that a passing wave of her handkerchief in the darkness, or a whispered good-night to some one standing under the balcony, would be infringing them in the faintest degree. But as time went on she once or twice expressed surprise that we so often came upon Thurston.

'It is so very odd,' she said innocently; 'it is just as though he knew all we meant to do every day—but, of course, that is impossible.' But though I agreed with her that it was odd, I kept my suspicions to myself. Gresham Terrace was not very far off. If Thurston wished to take an early stroll on the Embankment or in Battersea Park he would certainly pass our stables, and could easily find out anything he wished to know; and so it was that if we rode out early we were sure to have a fleeting glimpse of Thurston and his faithful satellite Ben; and once when father had to ride a little farther, on some errand, he crossed the road and helped us both to alight from our saddles.

And even when father decided on a later ride, more than once Sydney's knight was leaning over the park palings, evidently watching for our cavalcade. Sometimes father stopped and spoke to him, and of course we had to stop too. I thought Thurston

looked wonderfully handsome, only a little pale, as though July heat and confinement were trying him.

Of course, he found out the church we attended, and was always in his place when we arrived. Sometimes he was so near that we could hear his voice in the responses—Thurston had rather a nice voice,—and at the close of the service there was generally an opportunity for a look and word in the porch; but father would walk on quite calmly, leaving us to follow him.

But to return to our little dinner. If I had disturbed Mrs. Kennedy's mind with my extravagant menu, I certainly shocked Sydney by wearing the white chiffon dress which had been ordered for the wedding; and even Mardie seemed to disapprove.

'Oh, Githa!' exclaimed Sydney, when she came into my room with some flowers she had been arranging, 'your lovely dress,—why, it is far too good to wear to-night. I have put on my blue muslin, because I knew only Mr. Carlyon was coming.'

'But you look very nice,' I returned hastily, 'and your frock is quite new. I don't want flowers to-night,' I continued; 'those white rose-buds will just suit your dress, Syd, and Mardie will pin them on for you.'

'Are you quite sure you don't want them, dear?' she asked, surprised; but Mardie answered for me.

'Miss Githa looks fit for a ball-room now, Miss Herbert, and it would be a thousand pities for her new bodice to be spoiled with flower stains'; and then I knew that Mardie too disapproved of my extravagance. But I did not repent one bit when father called me Titania and held me out at arm's length to admire me; and I am afraid I repented

still less when, during dinner, I saw Mr. Carlyon look at me in rather an intent way, and in my foolish vanity I hoped that he thought I looked nice; but I felt rather perplexed when a sad expression crossed his face, and for a few minutes he seemed quite abstracted.

But it was a delightful evening, and to my satisfaction every one praised the ice-pudding. Mr. Carlyon and father talked as though they were old friends. It was really astonishing how much they seemed to have in common; they had both been abroad a great deal.

Mr. Carlyon took a deep interest in ecclesiastical architecture, and had seen all the most noted cathedrals in Europe. Father had seen less, but had read a good deal on the subject, and as he delighted in pictures and works of art, they found a common ground of interest.

I could have listened to them for hours, but I knew too well my duties as a hostess; but I told Sydney, as we sipped our coffee on the balcony, that I intended to study architecture. 'Father has the loveliest books and pictures in the library,' I went on, 'and I know he would be charmed to direct my studies. There is some talk of our going to Rome next winter; it is a dream of ours, and I should like to fit myself to be his companion.' But though this was quite true as far as it went, I was not perfectly honest, for why did my desire to study architecture only date from this evening?

Father stayed downstairs longer than usual, but I knew they were talking about Thurston. They came up presently, and we had some music, and Sydney and I both sang.

It was rather a warm night, and when I had finished my duet with Sydney I went out again on the balcony

to get cool. Mr. Carlyon followed me, and as we stood looking at the river and the lights on the Embankment, I caught sight of a dark figure moving slowly away. Of course it was Thurston; the poor boy had been listening to the songs. Mr. Carlyon had not noticed him. He seemed rapt in thought as he stood beside me. Then he turned to me a little abruptly, and there was still the same sad expression in his eyes.

‘Do you know you have been reminding me of some one all the evening, Miss Darnell’; he spoke in a low tone, full of repressed emotion.

‘I! Oh, do you mean that I am like my mother?’ But he shook his head.

‘No, not to-night. I was alluding to my wife—my dear Doreen. She was very young when we married, and as a girl ——’ then he stopped, as though unable to go on for the moment.

Lady Doreen! I reminded him of her! A curious thrill seemed to pass through me when Mr. Carlyon said this.

‘I saw her picture once,’ I returned in a low voice. ‘Stella took me to see it. I thought she looked so lovely, and her expression was so sweet.’

‘She was very beautiful when she was young,’ he replied in the same subdued tone. ‘When I said just now that you reminded me of her, I did not mean that there was a close resemblance; it was something in voice and manner. One cannot exactly define these fleeting and vague impressions, but they have come to me before when I have been with you. But to-night—to-night—it might have been Doreen herself who walked into the room.’

‘How strange!’ I almost whispered, and indeed I hardly knew whether to be glad or sorry that he had

told me this, for it pained me to think that I had brought that sad look to his eyes.

'There was a party at the Castle,' he went on, 'and she wore a dress like that—all white and fluffy, and a row of pearls round her throat. We were just engaged, and it was her seventeenth birthday, and I had taken her some flowers. I heard your father call you Titania this evening. That was the name I gave her that night.'

I put my hand on his for a moment—it was so close, and I was so sorry for him; but I was somewhat disconcerted when he detained it. But I was sure he understood what I meant.

'Thank you,' he said gently. 'I know I have your sympathy, and indeed I have needed it. Last Sunday was the anniversary of her death. It is just three years—three long years; but what is time in such circumstances? "We should count time by heart-throbs," as Bailey says.'

He still kept my hand, but I did not like to draw it away. Probably he had forgotten he was holding it.

'She was young when she died,' he went on in the same even voice, 'and at first she could not reconcile herself to the thought. It seemed hard that she should leave her little children and me. I thought my heart would have broken when I saw how unhappy she was, and then the evening before her death, thank God, the cloud lifted, and she looked at me with her old sunny smile.'

"I am not afraid now, Paul. I know my heavenly Father will take care of you and the children, and though He is parting us now, we shall be together for eternity."

I could not speak; I was so profoundly touched by this sacred confidence. I was trying to keep back the tears. Sydney was singing a pathetic little German

song about a peasant girl who had lost her lover on the wedding eve. Sydney's clear, sweet tones were thrilling with emotion. The same dark figure was pacing up and down—a small white body with short legs followed it closely.

'It is getting late,' observed Mr. Carlyon, rousing himself. 'Forgive me for saddening you, but the impulse to speak was so strong. Sometimes one needs sympathy, and you have given it without stint or measure.' What could he mean, when I had scarcely spoken a word? 'God bless you!' And then before I knew what he was going to do, he lifted my hand to his lips and turned slowly away, and I heard him tell father that he must hurry, as it was far later than he had guessed.

I stayed out for a few minutes to cool my burning cheeks, and as the front door opened I saw Thurston retrace his steps and join Mr. Carlyon.

I thought father looked at me a little curiously when I went back to the drawing-room. Sydney was putting away her songs in the portfolio.

'You and Carlyon found plenty to talk about, Gipsy; but then Titania always haunts the moonlight. You made a charming little hostess to-night, darling. Carlyon is a man after my own heart,' he continued. 'He is unusually broad-minded and wide in his sympathies for a parson. I hope he will soon repeat his visit'; and then father bade me good-night.

Sydney did not go out on the balcony as usual—I am afraid we gave her no opportunity; so I made amends by telling her that Thurston had been listening to her singing, and she blushed and dimpled with pleasure.

'I thought he would, and I sang all his favourite

songs,' she whispered; and then she ran out of the room.

But it was long before I could compose myself to sleep that night. Mr. Carlyon's unexpected confidence, his tone, his manner, had moved me strangely. Why had he been so sure of my sympathy when I had said so little? Could that impulsive touch of his hand have spoken for me? I felt a little distressed. Would he think me forward or unmaidenly, or only young and childish? But something told me he had not been displeased. 'If it had been any one else,' I said to myself, 'but with him it does not matter. He is so wise; he always understands. But I wonder, I wonder, why he did that?'

Mr. Carlyon went back to Bayfield the next day, but though he called at St. Olave's Lodge a fortnight later, when he came up to town *en route* for the Tyrol, we were all out, so he only left his card and inquired very kindly after every one. I thought father seemed sorry to miss him.

I was feeling very disappointed about Sydney just then. After all, she was not going back to Bayfield with me. Aunt Cosie had invited her to accompany her to Cromer. 'Of course I knew there was no chance of getting you, Githa,' she observed, when she talked the plan over with me. 'You are in far too much request, my dear; but as I need a young companion, and Miss Herbert has taken my fancy, I intend to ask her. I shall probably not return for six or seven weeks, as there is a great deal to be done in the house.'

My heart sank a little when Aunt Cosie said this, but I was ashamed to let her guess my feelings, so I promised to do my best with Sydney. To my surprise she seemed reluctant to accept the invitation.

'It is most kind of Mrs. Bevan,' she returned, 'and of course I should enjoy being with her—and Cromer is such a nice place—but I would much rather be at Prior's Cot with you and Aunt Yvonne.'

'But you are so fond of the sea, Sydney.'

'Yes, and I should be sorry to disappoint Mrs. Bevan,' but Sydney's tone was exceedingly dubious. 'I think we had better talk to Mr. Darnell, Githa, and be guided by what he says. If he advises me to write to Aunt Yvonne I will do so,' and she kept her word; and as father took Aunt Cosie's view, and seemed anxious that she should have a pleasant companion, the letter was written without delay.

Mother's answer came by return of post.

Sydney laid it down beside me without a word; but I was sure from her manner that the letter disappointed her, and yet nothing could have been kinder.

Mother wished her to accept Aunt Cosie's invitation. She said it was far too advantageous an offer to refuse; besides, it was evident that Mrs. Bevan really needed her.

'I know how you love the sea, and the change will do you a world of good,' she wrote. 'You have always wanted to take swimming lessons; well, now is your opportunity. Seriously, dear child, there is not a single obstacle to prevent your going to Cromer with a clear conscience. I shall have Githa for a month, at least, so there is no fear of my feeling dull'; and so on. I wondered if Sydney read between the lines as clearly as I did. Aunt Cosie's invitation evidently came at the right moment. Mother would be glad to have me to herself. I never knew if Sydney guessed this; but she went off that very morning to tell Aunt Cosie, and on her return

she informed me that everything was settled, and that she was going to order her new bathing dress, as mother had promised her a course of swimming lessons.

I saw Sydney was trying to make the best of it, and though I knew she would much rather have been at home just now, I was quite sure that she would be happy with Aunt Cosie. They were to start for Cromer two days before I was to leave for Bayfield, and that very evening father brought Thurston home with him, and kept him to dinner.

Father had an important letter to write in the evening, so Thurston and I sat on the balcony, talking about his plans and Sydney. He seemed quite bright and hopeful, only he confessed to a longing for the woods and Laddie. 'But I must dree my weird,' he finished, lifting his head a little proudly. "Rome was not built in a day," and I have not made my fortune yet; but she shall see.' And there was a brave, resolute expression in Thurston's eyes.

CHAPTER XXXIV

NOAH'S ARK

There comes a day with you and me
When all things with us disagree.
We hate ourselves, our friends we hate,
And doubt all good and rail at fate. . . .
The tide that ebbs will flow again ;
From rest to-day you wisely borrow
A double strength to bless to-morrow.

GOETHE.

I THOUGHT of Thurston's words as I travelled down to Bayfield two days later. 'I must dree my weird.' Oh, that sad little sentence! How often one hears it, and in what varying tones—proud, submissive, hopeless, resigned; and yet at certain periods of our lives we must all say it.

I had awakened with a heavy heart that morning. If it had not seemed fanciful I could have said that a presentiment of some impending trial seemed to oppress me—a vague, nameless anxiety, for which there appeared no reason. I was so low that I shed tears when I bade father good-bye; and though he pretended to laugh at me, and assured me that, to the best of his knowledge, we were not parting for life, I could see he was a little uneasy; for he begged me to

take care of myself and to write as often as possible. 'For you are far too thin and unsubstantial, Gip, for my taste,' he added ; but he had no time to say more as the train began to move.

I knew father was right. I was certainly thinner. Mardie had told me the day before with quite a grieved look on her dear old face ; but with all my surface brightness there was always the same deep, inward sadness underneath, as though something had gone wrong with my young life, and there could be no rest for me until it was set right. I am quite sure that no one guessed how I brooded over things. When father tried to amuse me, and was always planning little pleasures and surprises, I knew that he was cheating himself with the belief that Gipsy was so young that she would soon forget, and become accustomed to the situation ; and though my mother was less sanguine now, she too comforted herself with the recuperative powers of youth ; but they neither of them knew how it was with me, or how the thought of my visit oppressed me like a waking nightmare.

If I could only have had Sydney's bright, healthy companionship ; if the Vicarage were not empty ; but there was no one with whom I could exchange a word except mother. Morning, noon, and night we should be together, and always with this barrier between us ; and much as I loved her, the thought suffocated me.

Mr. Carlyon had told me about his old college friend, Mr. Grenville. He was a bachelor, and in some respects a woman-hater ; at least he was always shy with ladies.

'Grenville is a good fellow, and does his work well,' Mr. Carlyon had said to me that evening ; 'and he is a delightful companion when he is in touch with people ;

but his health is not good, and he is a bit of a recluse.' And this description made me think that we were not likely to have much intercourse with Mr. Grenville.

When I reached Prior's Cot mother received me as affectionately as ever. She had been doing up my room, and she took me up at once to see the new paper and some improvements she had made. I should have been hard to please if I had not been satisfied, for it was the daintiest little nest of a room, with its pink paper and new muslin hangings. Of course I thanked her, and praised all the arrangements; but she shook her head.

'The corner room at St. Olave's Lodge must be far nicer,' she observed; 'but I have done my poor best; and I daresay it will do well enough for summer quarters. If I could only have afforded a new carpet, Githa; but we must wait until next year for that.'

As we sat over our tea, mother told me that Lady Wilde had only left the previous day. Dr. Neale had gone away too for his holiday, and had left quite a young *locum tenens*. 'Dr. Ramsay is his name,' she went on; 'he is rather an angular-looking Scotchman, with high cheek bones; but Dr. Neale says he is clever, though I do not much like the look of him. Dr. Neale called to say good-bye, Githa, and then he told me that Lady Wilde had been ill.'

'Oh, not very ill, I hope?'

'No; but sufficiently so to make him a little bit anxious about her; for she is an old woman, you know. But he told me that she was decidedly better, and that she was going to Scarborough for two months.'

'And she has actually gone?'

'Yes. I was driving yesterday morning, and the

carriage passed me, and we both bowed. She certainly looked ill and rather altered. I am quite sure that she had not expected Thurston to take her at her word, and that she never meant things to come to this pass.'

'Dear mother, she has only to send Thurston a message, and he would go to her at once.'

'I have no doubt of it. But you see, Githa, Lady Wilde would think that weak and undignified on her part. She considers that her grandson is wholly in the wrong, and that he has behaved most ungratefully to her, and that any advances must be made by him.'

'Do you think we ought to tell him that?'

'Not at present. It would be useless, for he could not follow her to Scarborough.'

'But he could write.'

'I am not sure that she would answer his letter. She is a very obstinate old woman, Githa; and all this opposition has certainly not sweetened her temper, though it has made her ill. If Thurston would take my advice, he will do nothing until Lady Wilde returns to St. Helen's Towers; and then, if he has sufficient pluck, he might pay her a surprise visit. Of course one cannot tell what sort of reception will be given him, but at least he will have done his best to heal the breach.'

'I shall certainly tell him all this,' I returned, for I was much struck by the soundness of this advice; and then mother began to question me a little closely about Thurston and Sydney. I knew it was useless to evade her penetration; besides, Sydney was always so frank and unreserved in her letters; so I did not attempt to hide anything. I told her that we seemed

always coming across Thurston, that he evidently made himself acquainted with our movements, but that neither Sydney nor I were to blame.

I saw from mother's face that she was not pleased ; her lips tightened a little.

'It was not Sydney's fault,' I repeated ; 'she seemed always so surprised to see him, though she was pleased too ; and Thurston always had some plausible excuse for being just there.'

'I never thought of blaming Sydney.' But mother spoke in rather a cold, inflexible voice. 'But when I had stated my wishes so clearly, I think your father might have carried them out more carefully. He could not forbid Thurston to take an evening walk in the Park ; but there was no need to stop and speak to him, and I wish now I had never sent Sydney to St. Olave's.'

I flushed up indignantly. It was the first time that she had ever blamed father in my hearing, either directly or indirectly, and I had hard work to restrain myself from a hot defence. I bit my lip to keep silence, and my forbearance was rewarded, for mother's manner changed immediately.

'I beg your pardon, Githa. I did not mean to hurt you ; but I felt a little strongly about it. I did not certainly write to your father about Sydney ; but he knew, did he not, the conditions under which I was sending her ?'

'Yes, of course, mother ; and I know that he tried his best to fulfil them. He did so want Thurston to dine with us that evening when Mr. Carlyon came ; but he would not have invited him for the world. I think,' hesitating a little, 'that father is so soft-hearted that he hates seeing people uncomfortable, and so he

cannot help being kind to them ; and perhaps this makes him rather lax.'

An odd little smile came to mother's lips as I said this.

'I daresay you are right, my dear. I have seen your father take a world of trouble to restore a frozen bee to life, and to help a lame dog that had been run over. It made him uncomfortable to see anything in pain—it is his temperament, and you have it too, Githa ; but you must watch yourself carefully : even pity and compassion can deteriorate into self-indulgence and mere luxury of emotion.'

I sighed. Mother's ideal of duty always seemed so far beyond mine. I was certainly more father's child than hers. Like him, I was impulsive, and loved to give pleasure when help was needed. I could not sit down and calmly investigate the merits of the case. If a tramp were hungry, he must be fed, even if he refused to work ; and father was even more injudicious, for I had known him give money to a wretched-looking old man, shivering and shaking near a coffee-tavern.

'But he will not have hot coffee, Gip,' he observed with a rueful smile ; 'it will be gin—you may take my word for that. There is a public-house round the corner, and as soon as we turn our backs he will slip round.' And father was right. I remember I took him to task rather severely, but he would not be convinced.

'Poor old chap ! why should I not help him to get the one thing he wants to make him happy and to bring warmth to his bones ? There is no accounting for tastes. I should prefer the hot coffee, but our friend yonder has a preference for gin. Perhaps we should feel the same in his case.'

We talked a little more about Thurston and Sydney ; but I could see mother was very careful in what she said, and as I met her half way, we finished the conversation most harmoniously. Somehow these talks produced in me a sense of mental fatigue. Without being exactly conscious of the fact, my nerves were in a state of tension. In looking back at these August days, I know now that I was not in a normal condition. I was sensitive and nervous, and always on the watch ; for in spite of my mother's stern self-repression and guarded manner, she could not always restrain a querulous word of disapproval at my impulsiveness. At a sudden allusion to some home interest a shade would cross her face, or her lips would stiffen, and I knew by her silence that I had somehow hurt her, though I could not always guess the reason. It was a difficult position for us both, and if we had loved each other less things would have been easier.

I tried to settle down to my quiet life and to find some enjoyment in it, but I was nervously languid and restless, and the days seemed endless. The weather was unusually hot, and the country needed rain ; the pastures and gardens began to look dried up, and the wells were getting low. Mother used to look quite unhappy when she saw her flowers all drooping and wilted with the heat. 'How thirsty they look, poor things,' she would say ; 'and Sam tells me that we must not use the water. That is the worst of Bayfield—the water-supply is so limited unless we have it up from the river more than a mile away ; in very dry seasons things get rather serious.'

I had often heard mother say this before, but as she was generally away in August, she was spared a good deal of anxiety about her garden. The heavy

dews at night comforted her a little, and several times a day she consulted the barometer in the hall in the hope that rain might be expected ; and I am sure that the geese on the village green shared this hope.

The little ponds were nearly dried up, and there was much discontented hissing from yellow bills—even the ducks dibbling between the stones could find little moisture, and quacked their griefs noisily. Even the tinker's old grey donkey had her say, and her voice, though discontented, was so suggestive of misery that I went back to Prior's Cot and gave such a feeling description to mother that she made Sam carry a pail of water and a feed of corn to the green, and poor old Jenny had a royal feed. Jenny had a grateful disposition, and she never forgot a kindness : after that day when I passed her on the green she always lifted her head and softly brayed a welcome. I often carried her a few carrots, or a fresh lettuce or two, or an apple, and she would feed from my hand in the most confiding way. But I never could make friends with the geese. I disliked the way they came towards me with their long necks outstretched and their dusty wings flapping, and hissing out their grievances as though they thought the dried-up pond was my doing ; but, after all, geese have not a large amount of sense, and perhaps the poor things meant no harm.

As I always woke early I used to write my daily letter to father before breakfast, and considering that I had no news, it was wonderful how I contrived to fill the sheet ; but he always said that he enjoyed my morning chats.

After breakfast, as mother was generally busy for an hour or two, I used to stroll out with Roy ; even at that early hour it was rather hot for walking, but I was too restless to remain in the house or garden.

I liked to revisit my old haunts, the churchyard, and especially the long lane that led to Feltham Road.

Often I crossed the stile and the sloping meadow to a narrow, shut-in lane where there were two old thatched cottages standing side by side. They were very picturesque, with yellow lichen growing in the low eaves, and their tiny window and porch smothered in traveller's joy. They were so close together that but for the two porches one would have taken them for one cottage, and they were always called Noah's Ark. I never could discover the reason of this name, unless it arose from the fact that a certain Jonas Noah had built the cottages. I remember Mr. Carlyon shaking his head when I praised Noah's Ark somewhat enthusiastically.

'I grant you that they are picturesque,' he said rather gravely; 'but they are tumble-down, ruinous, old places, and in my opinion are quite unfit for human habitation. Some of the thatch is torn down, and the birds build their nests and make such havoc that the rain comes through, and there is not a whole board in the place. I have spoken several times to the owner, but he is a close-fisted old beggar, and very averse to putting his hand in his pocket; but, as I tell him, those cottages are a disgrace to Bayfield.'

Old Peggy Knowles had lived in one of those cottages, and the other was inhabited by a widow and her daughter. They were very respectable people and had known better days, but misfortune and poverty had driven them to the shelter of Noah's Ark. Ada Martin had been lame from her birth, and could only move with difficulty on her crutches; for years she had never left the lane, and her only change was to sit in her big arm-chair in the little front garden.

Mrs. Martin suffered from chronic asthma, which

prevented her from carrying on her work as a laundress. But both mother and daughter took in a little fine needlework. Mother was very good to them, and so was Mr. Carlyon, and even their poorer neighbours would bring them little presents of eggs or vegetables, or do a turn in the garden for them.

I had rather a liking for Ada; she was a patient creature, and bore her limitations without complaint. 'It was worse for mother,' she would say; 'it was dreadful to hear her breathing sometimes at night.'

'But it must keep you awake too, Ada,' I once said to her.

'Yes, I know, Miss Darnell, but I haven't got the pain and the suffocation. I could almost wish I had it sometimes, if I could have taken it from her;' for mother and daughter were devoted to each other.

I knew how much Ada enjoyed my reading to her while she worked, and I got into the habit of going two or three times a week. I read *Bede's Charity* to her and *Laddie*. The walk across the meadow was rather trying in the heat, but the kitchen was cool, and before I went home I generally had a glass of water. Mrs. Martin always brought it to me in a curious old goblet of either Dutch or Flemish work. Her father, who had been a sailor, brought it home from Holland, and it was quite a household treasure.

I am not sure that mother approved of these morning walks; she said they tired and took it out of me. 'It would be much better for you to take your book into the Wilderness,' she observed; 'those cottages are so airless and shut in. I am quite sure they must be terribly insanitary.' But I was deaf to that good advice. I could not stay in the Wilderness, and I much preferred Feltham Road and Noah's Ark.

CHAPTER XXXV

A DREAMER OF DREAMS

True, I talk of dreams,
Which are the children of an idle brain,
Begot of nothing but vain fantasy.

SHAKESPEARE.

For this relief much thanks.—*Hamlet*.

WHEN my early walk was over I always spent the rest of the day in mother's society. As the heat became more intense we generally betook ourselves to the hall, as it was the coolest place. Mother had a cane lounge and some chairs placed there for our use, and in the afternoon we dozed over our books. In the evening we sat in the garden or strolled about the lanes. Unfortunately the mare had lamed herself and we could not drive, and this prevented us from going on the river. I wondered if Bayfield were hotter than other places; there was so little air, and even the nights were not cool. I used to envy Sydney watching the waves rolling in, or splashing in the sun-warmed water; and then I thought of father, striding over moors purple with heather. 'The weather is perfect,' he wrote; 'such glorious days; but the evenings are a bit

chilly sometimes: we actually had a fire the other night, and quite enjoyed it.'

I am sure I tried my hardest to make myself a pleasant companion. I used to ransack my brain for interesting subjects. We discussed our favourite books and argued over them, and I sang all mother's favourite songs without being asked, and yet something seemed wanting to our enjoyment. With all my efforts there were breaks, pauses, long silences. Now and then my mother would get up and leave the room, and remain away quite a long time. I used to watch anxiously for her return; but she never offered any explanation. Her manner would be even kinder than usual when she next addressed me.

One evening when we had come in from our stroll, she led the way into the drawing-room, and I followed her rather listlessly. The day had been unusually sultry, and there was a breathlessness in the atmosphere which seemed to indicate an approaching thunderstorm. Mother had more than once alluded to the luridness of the sky. 'A thunder-shower would be a godsend,' she observed. 'If only I could hear the swish of the rain on those dry leaves I think I should sleep better'; and I could not help sighing as I re-echoed her wish. We had both slept badly the previous night, and all day I had been conscious of malaise and languor. I had felt a little faint while reading to Ada Martin that morning, and had been obliged to close the book. Mother looked at me a little keenly as I sighed. 'You have tired yourself again, Githa,' she said, in rather a repressive tone. 'You have looked far from well all day. Why not wait until the evening for your walk, and then I could accompany you? It would be far pleasanter.'

‘Of course, if you wish it,’ I returned reluctantly ; but my tone was not cheerful. How could I explain to her that it was the solitude and the companionship of my own thoughts that I craved ; but as usual she guessed all I had left unsaid.

‘It is not what I like, Githa,’ rather impatiently. ‘I was only speaking for your good. You come back tired and over-heated and unable to enjoy your luncheon, and you do not recover yourself all day. I wonder how long we are to go on like this?’

‘What do you mean?’ I faltered.

‘What do I mean!’—in a voice that alarmed me, it was so full of suppressed emotion. ‘Have you so little love for your mother that you cannot realise the pain you are inflicting, Githa? I have tried to be patient ; I have said nothing—not one word ; but I feel that I cannot bear it any longer. You are not yourself. You are not happy with me. God help me! but I believe you never will be.’

‘Mother!’ I was too startled and shocked to say more.

‘No, I would not lose hope,’ she went on. ‘I said to myself: Githa is so loving and gentle that if I give her time things will surely come right between us. But I am getting hopeless. We shall never understand each other’ ; and there was something so despairing in the beautiful, flexible voice that tears rushed to my eyes. It was the truth that she was telling me, and I could not contradict it.

Perhaps the electric condition of the atmosphere added to her excitement, for she seemed suddenly moved from her usual self-control.

‘Githa, have I not suffered enough? All my life—all my life since my marriage I have had dust and ashes

for my daily food. Oh, this loneliness, it is killing me, and yet one is not allowed to die; but at least I might have peace. Child, why do you look at me so strangely, as though you thought I were distraught? I am not angry, only I feel as though my heart were breaking.'

I knelt down beside her—speechless in my misery—but she made no attempt to draw me closer.

'There is no need for both of us to be unhappy, Githa; if you wish it you shall go home. If you write, your father will come back to you, and then you will be content.'

'Content! when you tell me that I am making you so miserable that you are forced to send me away from you! Mother, is this kind or just? What have I done or left undone that you should treat me so?' Then she turned and looked at me, and there was the old mother-love in her eyes.

'You have done nothing, Githa; it is not your fault. Poor child, you have tried so hard to do your duty.'

Her tone gave me courage. I laid my cheek against her arm. 'Mother, you know I love you—indeed I do,' as she shook her head. 'But somehow—oh, I cannot express it—we seem to be talking to each other at a distance, through prison bars. We are always trying to understand each other ——'

'And failing, Githa,' quietly finishing my sentence.

'Yes, and failing, if you will have it so; but all the same you shall not send me from you, neither would I consent to go.'

She pressed my hand. 'It is no use, darling; we shall be better apart, and I am not sending you away in anger.'

'You are not sending me away at all. Mother, will you listen to me patiently? There is something I always wanted to tell you—a strange, beautiful dream that came to me one night when I was unhappy.' And then wrapping my arms round her, I told her about the Angel of Forgiveness. Long before I ended the darkness enveloped us, and then the blue flash of lightning and the pealing of thunder drove Roy trembling and cowering to our feet; but I doubt if either of us heeded it, for the angel's closing words were on my lips: 'The secret of everlasting peace is theirs, for in their earthly days they loved much and showed mercy on the unmerciful.'

Another blinding flash, another crash of thunder over our heads; a long, pregnant moment of silence; then she tried gently to free herself.

'I must close the windows, Githa; the rain is beginning.'

'Yes, in a moment,' still holding her fast; 'but I have not quite finished. Mother, if you really love me, if you want me to be happy, let my dear angel speak to your heart. Forgive father the wrong he has done you—if not for his sake, for mine; forgive him and come back to us, and you will see for yourself that no mother was ever more honoured and loved.'

'Hush, darling! no more'; but before she left me she stooped and kissed my forehead. How cold her lips were, and was it my fancy that her face was wet? But in that darkness it was impossible to see.

I got up from the ground and groped my way to the couch, for I felt giddy and stupefied, and Roy crept into my lap, quaking in every limb. I could hear mother closing the windows; then her voice telling me not to be frightened, and she would send lights.

The storm seemed increasing in intensity, peal after peal reverberated overhead, and the flashes seemed continuous. A heavy torrent of rain added to the tumult, and every moment I grew more giddy. When Rebecca brought the lamp in she asked if she should stay with me, but I assured her that though it made me feel ill I was not afraid.

'You take after my mistress in that, Miss Githa,' she returned, roused by the storm out of her usual taciturnity; 'for she is standing in the porch this very moment, though I tell her it is tempting Providence.' I knew Rebecca wanted me to go and induce mother to come back into the drawing-room, but even if I had not been too dizzy to move, I knew any such errand would be fruitless.

Mother always gloried in a storm; she would sit and watch it from beginning to end with never-ceasing enjoyment; and to-night I knew her troubled spirit would be in harmony with the wild forces of nature. I thought Rebecca had left the room, but I heard her voice again close to me.

'The thunder is making your head bad, Miss Githa; you are looking poorly, and it is getting late, too; so you had better let me help you to bed.'

I felt that Rebecca was only carrying out mother's wishes, and as there was no getting rid of her, I allowed myself to be guided. Rebecca gave me her arm in her stiff and unsympathetic way. I believe no one but mother understood Rebecca. As we passed the porch mother turned round for a moment and waved her hand. Her face was quite white, and her eyes were strangely bright with that dark background and the cloudy grey of her gown. She looked—as Sydney had once described her—'as beautiful as an angel, if any of

those fair ministering spirits could have worn such a sorrowful expression.'

'That is right; Rebecca will take care of you. Good-night, dearest'; and then she turned again to watch the solemn pageantry of the skies. I was thankful, after all, for Rebecca's help; she did not leave me until I was safely in bed. The storm showed signs of lulling by that time, and the phenacetin she had given me had quieted me and relieved my head, and I fell into an uneasy doze; but it did not last long. After that I slept fitfully, and my dreams were a terror to me: they held me with the force of a nightmare. And if I succeeded in waking myself, it was only to fall asleep again from sheer exhaustion, and to find myself still beset by visionary horrors. I was always in grey, desolate places, with a red, lowering sky, and darkness creeping up behind us; for in spite of the silence and the awful dreariness I was not alone—my mother was beside me.

We seemed trying to overtake a figure walking swiftly down a rocky defile. I knew it was father, and strove to call to him; but my voice was inarticulate and he did not seem to hear.

Then I wanted to hurry after him, but my mother was tired, and leant heavily on my arm. I could feel her weight impeding me, and the swish of her grey dress as we stumbled among the boulders was quite audible to me. 'Faster, faster!' I seemed to say to her; then a sort of fog suddenly blotted out everything.

I woke panting and in a vague terror, but Roy licked my hand and that gave me a sense of comfort. The little creature had curled himself up on my bed, in spite of Rebecca's strong disapproval, and refused to

leave me; and the touch of his warm little body and the sound of his breathing soothed me.

The rain had ceased, but my room was very dark. I wanted to open the window, and get some water, for my throat was parched and dry; but mother was a light sleeper and I feared to awaken her. After a time, however, I slept again, only to find myself in a still more evil plight.

This time I was on a cliff. My mother was not with me, though I had a vague notion that she was behind; but father was still ahead. I was nearer to him, and could see him distinctly, but I was again in the grip of nightmare, and my voice was inaudible.

The wind was blowing, and the sea boiled below us like a cauldron. I could see huge waves hurling themselves against the cliff, and could feel the cold, salt spray on my face. The sombre light, the greyness of sea and sky, the hideous tumult and noise, filled me with alarm. Then a new terror beset me. The cliff was unguarded, except by the tossing spray, and the wind was strong; surely father was walking carelessly and too near the edge. Again I tried to call—to run—but my feet were weighted with lead. I saw him stumble, reel, and put out his hands to save himself. Then a mountainous wave washed over him—and he was gone.

My scream of terror aroused mother, and she came hurrying in, to find me sitting up trembling, with poor little Roy whining beside me.

'What is it, darling? You must have been dreaming.' But her hands shook as she lighted the lamp and then sat down on the bed beside me. But I was only half-awake, and the thing seemed so horribly real!

'But he fell over the cliff, mother—a big wave

washed over him and carried him out to sea. I saw it, and I felt the salt water on my face.'

'You are a dreamer of dreams, my dear one,' she returned soothingly. 'Why, what nonsense! It was only a nightmare. Very likely the storm excited you, and then your head was bad. There—I will turn your pillow. Lie down again, dearest, and I will sponge your hot face with eau-de-Cologne and water, and give you some lemonade'; and all the time she busied herself in these kindly ministrations she talked to me in a quiet, reassuring way. But the nameless terrors that beset me were not to be so easily conjured away. A new thought harassed me—a sudden, unbearable anxiety. I caught mother by the arm as she was straightening the sheet.

'Mother, if I should be ill—very ill—you will send for father. I could not be without him then.'

My feverish imaginations had made me callous to her feelings. I never guessed that she sat down so quickly on the edge of my bed because she could not stand; but her voice was steady in its gentleness.

'Do not be afraid, my child. You can surely trust me.' But I was not pacified.

'But I want your promise, mother. You are so true—so true—and I know you never break your word.' Then she stooped over me so closely that her face nearly touched my hair.

'Be at rest, my poor child, for I will certainly give you that promise. If you are ill your father shall come to you'; and then with a sob of gratitude I clung to her in silence.

CHAPTER XXXVI

PHANTASMAGORIA

Who is the Angel that cometh ?
Pain !
Let us arise and go forth to greet him ;
Not in vain
Is the summons come for us to meet him ;
He will stay,
And darken our sun ;
He will stay
A desolate night, a weary day.
Since in that shadow our work is done,
And in that shadow our crowns are won,
Let us say still while his bitter chalice
Slowly into our hearts is poured,
'Blessed is he that cometh
In the name of the Lord !'

A. PROCTER.

THE faint dawn was stealing through the room before my mother left me. I had fallen asleep holding her hand, and her light movements hardly roused me. This time my rest was untroubled by my terrifying dream.

Rebecca brought me my breakfast, and a little later mother came in. She was fully dressed, but looked worn and weary ; but as usual she made light of her own fatigue, and seemed only concerned on my account.

'The storm has upset you, and no wonder,' she observed. 'It was more violent than any we have had for years. Rebecca tells me that the maids were much

alarmed. I thought it glorious, but I am afraid my poor roses are spoiled, Githa.'

'I am so sorry for that, mother.'

'Never mind,' with an effort after cheerfulness, 'there was abundance of rain. The trees and shrubs were drinking thirstily for hours, and they do look so refreshed. If you would only follow their example.'

Mother wanted me to remain quietly in bed, but I was far too restless; and though my back and head still ached, and I felt strangely tired, I preferred to dress myself and lie on the drawing-room couch. Later in the day mother wished to send for Dr. Ramsay, but I would not hear of it. If Dr. Neale had been at home I would not have refused to see him, for we were good friends; but the idea of a stranger was repugnant to me. I got so excited, that she gave up the idea for the present. 'Very well, then, we will wait and see how you are to-morrow,' she returned; but she did not seem quite satisfied. I do not remember how the day passed, but it seemed unusually long. I managed with a good deal of difficulty to write a short letter to father, but though I told him about the storm I said nothing of my languor and depression. When this task was accomplished mother shaded the room, and I lay with closed eyes; but I could not sleep. I had spoken more than once during the day of Ada Martin—thunder always affected her—and after tea mother proposed walking over to Noah's Ark. She did not bring me back a good report. Ada had been so ill the previous night that Mrs. Martin had sent for Dr. Ramsay. 'He came when I was there,' she went on, 'and we walked back together. I thought he seemed a little uneasy about the girl, though he said it was too early to diagnose the case, and that he would be able to judge better

when he saw her again. But he told Mrs. Martin that Ada's bed must be moved downstairs, as the room was stifling under that thatched—— Are you cold, Githa ? ' for I was shivering a little.

'No ; I was only anxious about poor Ada.'

'I don't think there is cause for anxiety, my dear. Ada is often ailing. Dr. Ramsay thought I had better not go up, as he wished her to be quiet.'

'Then you did not see her ?' in a disappointed tone.

'No, dear. I could hardly disregard his orders ; but I am going to send Rebecca across after dinner with some toilet vinegar and jelly, and a few little comforts. Githa, do you know Dr. Ramsay shares Dr. Neale's opinion ? He says those cottages are terribly insanitary. He means to have them thoroughly investigated—he is going to write to the Inspector to - night—and he is not satisfied about the water. Something has come to his notice which has made him suspicious about one or two of the cottages. I really think he is a very clever man, though one cannot call him exactly prepossessing.'

I suppose I looked just a little queer when mother said this, for she knitted her brows in rather an anxious manner.

'I hope you did not drink any of the water, Githa ?'

'I am afraid I did, mother. I used to get so hot and thirsty with reading, and it really tasted quite nice, except once, and then I did not drink much.' I saw mother press her lips very firmly together, as though she feared to speak, and then she drew back, and I could not see her eyes. The mischief had been done, and she would not waste words. Probably she was unwilling that I should dwell on it ; for a few minutes later when I alluded to it of my own accord, she said

rather hastily that though it was a foolish thing to do, and that I must never do it again, there was probably no great harm done ; and, after all, Dr. Ramsay might be an alarmist. But I wondered if she was trying to cheat herself as well as me, and if she really believed her own words ; but I was too weary to pursue the thought. She went away to prepare for dinner, but I was unable to partake of the tempting little meal provided for me ; the sight of food gave me positive nausea, and I was quite grateful when mother proposed that I should go to bed. I found Rebecca in my room when I went upstairs, and she waited on me in her silent, efficient way. It was a relief to lay my head on my pillow, and I was so exhausted that I dozed a little ; then I woke with a start, and thought mother was in the room, but when I spoke to her Rebecca answered me.

‘Were you wanting anything, Miss Githa ? The mistress has just stepped out to take the air, but she will not be long.’

I felt a vague surprise when she said this. Mother must be restless too, I thought, to go out again after her long walk. There was something I wanted to ask her, but I could not recollect what it was ; perhaps it was the ringing in my head which made me so confused.

‘Were you wanting the mistress, Miss Githa ?’ Rebecca asked again in her smooth, expressionless voice.

‘I do not know—I forget—oh, it does not matter,’ rather fretfully. ‘I wish you would open the window wider, Rebecca. I am so hot, and my head aches so.’

‘Perhaps you would like me to bathe it with some toilet vinegar’ ; but I turned restlessly away. ‘No thank you—nothing seems to do any good ; if you could only

stop the bells ringing in my head.' And then a sudden thought came to me.

'Rebecca, I thought you were going across to Noah's Ark this evening with things for Ada Martin.'

'Parkins is taking them, Miss Githa; don't you worry about it, there's a dear young lady.' How strange of her to say that! Rebecca, worthy creature as she was, was seldom affectionate—not even to her mistress, to whom she was absolutely devoted. 'Parkins always enjoys an evening walk.' Parkins was the cook, a stout, good-natured woman.

'Do you think she can manage the stile with the jelly and things?' I asked anxiously. It was such an odd, trivial thought to come into my head, but Rebecca took it quite seriously. I had no idea that she was humouring me.

'Parkins is an active body in spite of her size, Miss Githa, and being born and bred in these parts she is used to stiles, and there's a gate on the Feltham Road that is seldom padlocked'; and I was so satisfied with this explanation that I consented to lie down again. What absurd trivialities harassed me, for now an old trashy nursery rhyme was haunting me. *Mardie* used to sing it to me. I could not remember the words, but Rebecca was again equal to the occasion.

'What is troubling you now, Miss Githa?' she asked composedly.

'There was something my old nurse used to sing to me, and the noises in my head brought it to my mind,' I returned, in quite a vexed voice. "It was about bells—bells—oh, I can't tell how it went—and it worries me.'

'I think I know the old rhyme you mean, Miss

Githa. My mother used to sing it to us children when father tossed us on his foot :—

‘ Ride a cock horse to Banbury Cross,
See an old woman ride on a cock horse,
With bells on her fingers and bells on her toes,
She shall have music wherever she goes.’

‘ Oh, thank you, Becky, that is what I meant ; but the bells were not ringing in her head, you know.’

‘ It would not have rhymed, Miss Githa,’ she returned, shaking up my pillow. ‘ Now, you had better try to go to sleep again. I shall be within call if you want me.’

I suppose I must have dozed again, for it seemed to me that I was lying on a bank of heather on a sunshiny moor, and that the bees were humming round me, such a noisy, continuous hum, which grew faster and faster. The busy winged things seemed everywhere—on my dress and brushing my face ; then they rose in a cloud, and I was awake again.

Surely some one was speaking outside the door. Rebecca—of course it was Rebecca’s voice. ‘ She is a little light-headed, ma’am, and perhaps it is as well ’—here the voice became inaudible, and then mother came into the room. She was rather breathless, and her hair was disordered, as though she had removed her hat very hurriedly.

‘ Rebecca tells me that you were wanting me, dearest. I am so sorry ; but it was such a lovely evening after the rain, and I was a little restless and worried.’ But all the time she was speaking her hand was on my wrist.

‘ Your poor head is bad, my darling.’

‘ Yes, yes, but it does not matter ; we must dree our

weird. Thurston said so, and he is a truthful person.' Then the old worry and confusion seized me again. 'Mother,' I said, half crying, 'there is something I want to say to you—something very important—but I cannot recollect what it is, and it does trouble me so.'

'Shall I help you, dearest? I think I can. You just wanted to remind me of my promise.'

I clasped my hands round her arm, and laid my burning face against them.

'That was it,' I whispered. 'Mother, you will have to send for him soon, for I am going to be very ill.'

It is quite impossible for me to write connectedly of all that followed. The semi-delirious state lasted throughout the night, and for many, many nights and days afterwards, with only short intervals of consciousness. They told me the delirium was never violent, but that I always seemed much distressed and troubled by uneasy dreams, and that I appeared to suffer greatly from confusion of thought, and sometimes a lack of power to express myself intelligibly; it was not easy to rouse me from my comatose condition, or to recall my wandering thoughts; that for many nights I had no natural sleep, and talked much and incoherently, but that there were times when I seemed more like myself, and spoke rationally. My own impressions were as vague as they were fugitive. That first night I was fully aware that the tall man who was feeling my pulse was Dr. Ramsay. 'I am ill,' I told him, 'not only because I drank so much of the water, but because—because'—looking into his ugly, clever face—'I was so dreadfully unhappy.'

'Will you tell me why you were so unhappy, Miss Darnell?' He had rather a nice voice, and it roused

me as I seemed dozing again ; then my mother leant forward and touched me.

‘You forget ; you are not unhappy now, darling ; you have my promise.’

‘Mother knows all about it and the angel too,’ I murmured drowsily, as my eyes closed.

It was after this I saw a kind woman’s face bending over me, and quiet hands that seemed very busy about me. I have a vague idea that I asked her her name, and that she said : ‘I am your nurse, my dear—Nurse Esther ; and I am going to take care of you, and some one of whom you are very fond will help me.’

I liked Nurse Esther’s face—and I think I told her so ; and then soon afterwards I had such a pleasant dream that I was half afraid of waking, for I thought my dear Mardie was beside me, and that she was crying and holding my hand. ‘I want to go on dreaming,’ I said to myself ; but I suppose I spoke aloud, for some one in the room actually sobbed.

‘I can’t help it, my precious, to see you lying there so ill, and talking about angels, and all sorts of queer things’ ; and then the mist cleared, and I knew it was Mardie’s kind old face, and that she had come to help nurse me.

‘I am so glad,’ I murmured, as I flew off into space again.

For always it seemed to me as though I were climbing a steep hill, sometimes with a heavy burden in my arms. I never knew why I was so bent on reaching the summit, but however high I climbed, I never got nearer. At another time I seemed to be floating amongst the stars, through vast spaces of cloudy ether ; there were shining worlds above and below me, and this dream was exceedingly painful to

me. I wondered if I were a disembodied spirit, I had so completely lost all power of gravitation. The idea that I was drifting farther and farther from the earth amongst millions of worlds was awful to me, but more than once Mardie's comfortable, homely voice recalled me.

Things always seemed blurred and indistinct to me. My own fevered imaginings so confused me, that I was never sure whether it was morning or evening, and even the night was not dark.

Quiet footsteps glided about the room, tender hands were laid on my throbbing temples ; sometimes I was conscious of my mother's presence. One evening I was unusually restless—I had been wandering a good deal. This time I imagined that I was in a dry, sandy place, and that a river lay between me and some sunny meadows where lambs were feeding. There was no bridge, and the water looked deep. 'Father must carry me across,' I muttered. Was it part of my dream that some one near me whispered : 'Speak to her, Philip ; she will know your voice, and it will rouse her.'

'Of course I will carry you, Gipsy—anywhere, everywhere, my darling.' A strong, warm hand touched me. Something—was it a moustache?—brushed my cheek. 'I am here, my pet ; open your dear eyes and look at me.'

The meadows and the river receded into the distance at the sound of that beloved voice. 'Father, my own father,' I murmured blissfully, as I nestled closer to him and strove to lay my weary head upon his breast. Then a man's deep sob answered me.

'Hush, Philip ! She is very weak ; we must be careful. Hold her in your arms—she will be at rest there.' And after this I knew no more.

CHAPTER XXXVII

'THROUGH PAIN TO PEACE'

Forgive, O God !
The blindness of our passionate desires !
The fainting of our hearts ! the lingering thoughts,
Which cleave to dust ! Forgive the strife ! accept
The sacrifice, though dim with mortal tears.

F. HEMANS.

Peace, the central feeling of all happiness.

WORDSWORTH

IT is useless and painful to dwell on that weary time, which seemed to me so indistinct and shadowy.

The fever ran its course ; the hours passed into days and days into weeks. Everything that love and skill could devise was done for me. Dr. Neale returned, and Dr. Tressiter—our kind doctor from Cheyne Walk—came backwards and forwards to watch over my progress. More than once he brought with him a white-haired, fatherly old man, who was, I heard later, a noted specialist. Alas ! as the fever lessened, my weakness seemed to increase, and I know now that for many days my condition was extremely critical.

They have told me since that my father's presence had a wonderfully soothing effect upon me, and that I never seemed easy unless he were beside me ; that

even if I were too weak to speak, I would move my hand towards him that he might take it. Certainly from that time my dreams were less distressing, and even in my wanderings he could recall me to consciousness by speaking my name. Mardie has told me since that my mother never left me except to take needful food and rest. My poor, dear mother, what she must have suffered in those days!

One night when I was unusually weak and restless, and father was fanning me softly, I motioned to him to stoop a little, that my feeble voice might reach his ear.

'Father, dear, I do not think I am dreaming, but surely the angel is in the room.' I could feel him start.

'Good Heavens, my darling, what angel?'

And for the moment I could not find strength to answer him. For it seemed to me as though the dear, beautiful angel of my dream was standing at the foot of my bed, and that there was a grieved, reproachful look upon his face.

'It is not my fault,' I seemed to say to him; but I must have spoken aloud. 'I have done all I could, and it has made me ill, and mother will not forgive.' Then some one beside me rose hastily and left the room.

'Hush, Gipsy! hush, my little girl! there is no one here but father. You are dreaming, dearest.' But I shook my head; to me it was no hallucination.

The crisis had passed, but my convalescence was very slow. My weakness was so great, and I made so little progress from day to day, that my doctors seemed perplexed and anxious. Once when Dr. Tressiter was alone with me—he had sent Nurse Esther away on

some errand—he asked me in his kind, friendly way if anything were troubling me ; but I could not bring myself to answer him.

For a weary sense of dejection and hopelessness seemed sapping at the roots of my vitality, and I cared for nothing but to lie with my hand in father's, while he read me some simple poem or story. It was his voice that soothed me, for I remembered little what he read. I cared less for the flowers mother brought me. They seemed to make me sad, and yet I loved to look at them. I hardly knew myself what ailed me, but I felt as though I never wished to get well and strong again. If any one spoke kindly to me the tears flowed ; it seemed so ungrateful not to care, after all their love and devotion. I could scarcely bear to see mother's wan, changed look. I knew she had worn herself out during these weeks of watching and suspense. They had removed me into my mother's room because it was large and airy. There was a smaller room opening into it where she always slept. Nurse Esther was still with us—mother was unwilling to part with her—but she only came to me once or twice in the night, to give me nourishment and see if I were comfortable.

One evening I had retired to bed early ; the day had been unusually sultry for September, and I had been much oppressed and very languid. Mardie was sitting in the inner room. I had begged her to leave me alone, but she was unwilling to go far away.

'I shall be within call if you feel lonesome, Miss Githa,' she had observed. 'You have had a bad day, my dearie ; but the cool air and the twilight may soothe you to sleep.'

I thought this not improbable, and the stillness was so restful that after a time I was just dropping into a dose when the hushed sound of voices under my window roused me to wakefulness.

I had always a very keen sense of hearing—Mardie had often commented on it—but to-night it seemed abnormal; though the voices were purposely lowered, I could hear every word. I forgot in my intense interest that it was not meant for my ear, or I would have covered up my head. It was my father speaking.

'Dr. Tressiter is sure that there is something on the child's mind that is retarding her progress. He confesses that both he and Dr. Neale are much disappointed; there seems now no adequate cause for such extreme prostration.'

'He said as much to me,' returned my mother dejectedly.

'Yvonne, how long is this to go on?' Father's voice was raised a little. 'Are you not content with wrecking my life's happiness, but will you also kill your own child? Do we not both know what is troubling her? She is too weak to bear it, and I will not answer for the consequences.'

'Hush, Philip! you are speaking too loud; she will hear us'; and then they seemed to move farther away.

My heart was beating so that I could scarcely breathe. Did father really mean that I was going to die? And then as I thought of the lonely drifting among the stars I shuddered and grew cold. I was young—so young—and until this year life had been so strangely sweet. A passion of self-pity and sorrow seemed to shake my weak frame. I longed to call to mother, to tell her that, after all, I did not want to die—that she must save me.

I do not know how long I lay in this state of agitation, but I was growing cold with exhaustion, and in another moment I should have summoned Mardie, only at that instant I heard mother's voice in the inner room. She was asking if I were asleep. I heard Mardie say that she thought so, but was not sure; then mother came herself to look. She carried her little shaded lamp; the next moment she set it down hastily by the bed.

'What is it, my child,' in an anxious voice; 'do you feel ill?'

'I don't know,' in a trembling voice; 'I think I am frightened. No, don't call Mardie, please; I heard what you and father said under my window. I do not want to die, and yet how is one to go on living like this?' She looked at me—shall I ever forget the anguish in her eyes? We were torturing her beyond her endurance, but her voice was still firm.

'Githa, lie still a minute, and drink this, and I will speak to you directly.' She gently closed the door of communication between the rooms; then taking my hands she knelt beside me and waited patiently until the restorative had brought back the colour to my lips.

'I am better, mother. Will you talk to me now?'

'Very well. I will ask you a question, darling, and you must answer it frankly. Is it true what he—your father—said just now, that this trouble between us is fretting you so that you cannot get strong?'

'I think it is true,' I whispered. 'Oh, mother dear, it is all so miserable that I hardly care to get well. And yet to-night the idea of dying frightens me,' finishing with a weak sob.

'You shall not die, my sweet,' and her arms almost

crushed me in their strong pressure. 'Be comforted, Githa; your mother loves you better than herself. God help me, for I cannot help myself; it shall be as you and your father wish.'

'Mother—oh, my dear, my dear—do you mean that you have forgiven him?' And as she moved her lips in assent, it appeared to me as though the silvery masses of her glorious hair seemed in the lamplight to shine like a nimbus round her head.

In the unspeakable agitation of that moment neither of us heard the door open gently, or saw a dark figure standing motionless on the threshold; then it moved towards us and I saw it was father.

'Yvonne, is this true? Oh, my God, can this be true!' laying his hand on her shoulder as she still knelt beside me. Then she looked up at him and said in a low, thrilling voice: 'Philip, I have been wrong. I know it now. I will try to forgive as I hope to be forgiven; only be patient with me for our child's sake.'

They have told me since that the shock of joy was too much for me in my weakened state; that I passed from one fainting fit into another, and that for some hours I was so ill that my life seemed to hang on a thread. But, thank God, I was brought back from the valley of the shadow of death. 'As one whom his mother comforteth,' those were the first words that came to me in my returning consciousness.

Dr. Neale remained in the house all night; for days my parents were not allowed to see me unless I were sleeping; and even Mardie, my faithful old nurse, was banished from the room. The least excitement or agitation would be dangerous, Dr. Neale

warned them, and Sister Esther was to have sole charge of me.

I was too weak to rebel, and Nurse Esther was so good to me. She called me her baby, and treated me so wisely and tenderly, that I could not help loving her. She was a sweet woman, who had known many sorrows, and whose vocation was nursing; even Mardie, who was always jealous of any one who interfered with her special prerogative, declared that Nurse Esther was a treasure.

It was only natural that I should long for my dear ones; but in spite of everything those days of enforced seclusion were strangely peaceful. There was joy deep down in my heart—a secret gladness which I was too weak to investigate properly.

As I sank into quiet sleep at night, I would smile to think of those two standing beside me hand-in-hand, and perhaps laying a light kiss on my brow. 'If only I could wake and see them,' I would say to myself; but I never could do this.

I used to hear Nurse Esther telling Dr. Neale how brave and good I was, and then he always spoke a few approving words, but neither of them guessed that it was my strong wish to live that made me so docile; for the thought of returning health was sweet to me, and the sunshine of a new hope seemed to gild the future. Then came a day when patience had its reward; when, as I lay pillowed upon the couch beside the open window, Nurse Esther told me that she had the doctor's permission to admit visitors, and that my mother was going to have tea with me.

For the moment I wondered why father let her come first; but he told me himself, later on, that he could not be sure of himself, and that he was so afraid

of hurting me, that they had arranged this between them.

When mother came into the room in her quiet way and kissed me, I was so shocked at the change in her appearance that I could hardly help crying. They had not told me that she had been ill, that she had broken down under the suspense and misery of that night. Only once she ever spoke of it to me, and then it was years later. 'It was the last straw, Githa,' she said; 'I had suffered so much, and I felt I could bear no more, and I thought you were dead, and I flung myself upon you, and Dr. Neale made your father take me away. I think I was not myself'; and she put her hand to her head in a weary way, as though even the recollection was too much for her. 'If you had died that night, I think it would have killed me too.'

Mother would not let me talk sadly that afternoon. When I stroked her cheek and told her how thin it was, she only smiled and said she would soon grow fat again, and then she gave me a message from father. He had walked over to the Vicarage, and would come in presently, but not until we had finished our tea.

Nurse Esther, who was arranging the tea-table, looked on approvingly: mother's tact and self-control evidently inspired her with confidence, and she felt she might safely trust me to her care. I was very happy, and yet I was still so weak that my hands shook when I tried to hold my cup properly, and mother pretended to laugh at my awkwardness, but she helped me all the time so nicely. It struck me more than once that she looked older. But what a dear, beautiful face it was—there seemed a new expres-

sion in her eyes—it was still sad, but softer and far more gentle.

Once as she was stooping over me to straiten my pillows, I drew her face down to mine. 'If you only knew how dearly I love you, mother,' I whispered; but she only smiled at me in reply. I knew then that she had promised Nurse Esther to be very careful, and not to encourage any emotion. The next moment she disengaged herself quietly, and sitting down by me she talked about the garden and her flowers, and how they seemed to miss me downstairs. 'But we shall soon have you there again,' she continued brightly. It was lovely to lie there in the warm sunshine and watch her, but my cup of bliss was full to the brim when father joined us. Mother gave up her place to him at once.

'Well, Gipsy,' he said, trying to speak cheerfully, 'how is my darling this evening?' But his voice was not clear; and though I whispered that I should soon be well, and that I was so happy—so happy, he only kissed me very tenderly, and then sat down beside me, shading his face with his hand as though the light were too strong for him. Poor father, they had coached him so carefully in his part; but he was a poor actor, and he was already breaking down a little. Perhaps at that moment he realised how nearly he had lost his Gipsy!

It was mother who noticed first I was growing weary. 'Philip,' she said very gently, 'I think Githa is tired; if we leave her now, she will rest a little, and Nurse Esther will let us stay longer to-morrow. I am going to fetch her now.'

Father rose to open the door for her, but when he came back to me, I looked up in his face with a

smile. 'Father, dear, it is not Darnell and Co. now, for we have got mother, and I have been telling her that I love her so dearly.' Then I saw a quick flash in his eyes, and he said something under his breath. Was it, 'And so do I, Gip'? But I could not be quite sure. Only I think, I really think, he said it.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

AUTUMN VINTAGE

Oh, what is the pathway white, with parapets of light,
Whose slender links go up, go up and meet in heaven high?
'Tis the Road of the Loving Heart from earth to sky.

ANON.

Put love into the world, and heaven with all its beatitudes and glories becomes a reality. . . . Love is everything, it is the key to life and its influences are those that move the world.—R. WALDO TRINE.

FROM that day I made steady progress, and there were no more serious drawbacks. Every afternoon when I had taken the rest Nurse Esther still so rigidly enforced, mother spent an hour or two with me, and father generally came too. I loved to have them together, and when father read to me it was always a pleasure to see mother working at her embroidery, and then raising her eyes every now and then to look at us. She was always very silent when father was in the room, but I think she enjoyed listening to our talk. I noticed sometimes how seldom she addressed him—never unless it were necessary, and that when she did so there was a new, gentle chord in her voice; and now and then when his footstep sounded unexpectedly in the inner room, I saw her change colour. It might be my fancy perhaps, but it seemed to me that she was

not quite at her ease with him ; and yet to me who loved him so, there was something indescribably touching in the way she tried to meet his wishes—as though she strove to make amends for some wrong that she had done him.

Her health had suffered terribly, and I could see by the way father watched her that he was anxious about her. He would say sometimes in his kind, whimsical way that his womenkind gave him a great deal of trouble ; but I am sure that he was happier than he had been for many a long year. Mother was always very patient, and she never complained of her want of strength ; indeed, she tried to hide it as much as possible. Only she once said a little sadly that she wished she could do more for me. When I grew stronger father used to carry me down to the drawing-room, and then mother was always with me. I never liked any one else to perform this office, and as father knew this, he often put himself to great inconvenience that he might be there at the proper hour ; and even if he went up to town, he would take an early train back that he might be in time. My first drive was quite an event in the household, but after that I went out daily. Mother always accompanied me, and very often father drove us. How I enjoyed those drives and the mellow sweetness of the September air !

It was after this Sydney came home. Aunt Cosie brought her, but she only stayed a few hours. The dear old thing fairly wept over me when she took me in her arms, but we soon succeeded in cheering her up. Mother was unusually quiet that day—I think the meeting with Aunt Cosie tried her ; but Aunt Cosie behaved beautifully. She went straight up to mother and kissed her, and said something nice and kind, though

I could not hear what it was ; but such a lovely colour came to mother's face, and then she kissed Aunt Cosie again of her own accord.

I thought Sydney looked sweeter than ever, and she was so overjoyed at seeing us all again. I could hear her singing 'Home, sweet Home' as she moved about her room ; and she was so dear and affectionate to me. 'For you have had such a bad time, you poor thing,' she said pityingly, 'and even now you look only half your size'; and then Sydney winked away a bright teardrop or two.

'I am not going to cry when you are getting well,' she went on, quite indignant at her own weakness ; 'and I believe it is true what Mr. Darnell said, that I am so sunburnt and robust, that I make you look quite pale and washed out.'

Sydney owned frankly that she had had a pleasant time, and that but for her anxiety on my account she would have been very happy. She and Aunt Cosie had got on splendidly together ; indeed, they seemed quite sorry to part.

Mother drove alone with Aunt Cosie to the station. Aunt Cosie asked her to do so, and mother willingly consented ; it would give them both an opportunity to talk more freely. And I was sure from mother's face when she returned that evening that Aunt Cosie had done her good.

I had asked mother more than once about Mr. Carlyon. To my surprise I heard that he had not yet returned, or the children either ; and later on she told me that the friend with whom he had been travelling in the Austrian Tyrol was ill, and he found it impossible to leave him, and that Mr. Grenville was still at the Vicarage. Mr. Carlyon had written to her, and

she had answered his letter. 'He seemed very grieved to hear of your illness, Githa,' she went on, 'and he begged that I would let him have a card. He is afraid that he will not be home until quite the end of this month, so Mr. Grenville had kindly offered to stay on, though he feared it put him to much inconvenience. There, I think I have given you the gist of the letter'; and after that I was ashamed to ask mother to let me read it.

I had thought a great deal about Mr. Carlyon during my illness, and I could not forget our last talk; and the remembrance of that poor young Lady Doreen, who did not wish to die, quite haunted me! I seemed to understand what she felt, and to be so sorry for her. I longed to hear more about her, and I wondered, too, if Mr. Carlyon was really anxious about me. It was nice of him to ask mother to send him a card; it looked as though he thought of me a little.

It was Sydney who brought me the next news. She had seen Mr. Grenville driving away from the Vicarage, and she had noticed the luggage. 'There was a cart with two heavy cases of books,' she went on; 'they say he always takes a good part of his library about with him. I spoke to Dickinson, who was at the gate; he told me that the children were coming back to-morrow, and that the vicar was expected on Thursday.'

'On Thursday! Are you quite sure, Sydney?' and my voice was a little breathless. And Sydney, who was sorting her music, answered in rather an abstracted manner, that Dickinson had certainly said Thursday.

'And we shall be glad to get him back, shall we not, Githa?' she observed cheerfully; 'for somehow

Bayfield never seems the same without Mr. Carlyon, "the ideal parson," as Thurston used to call him when he wanted to tease us.' For Sydney took every opportunity of repeating Thurston's speeches when we were alone; she said it made her miss him a little less to talk about him. Poor Sydney! as though she did not think about him morning, noon, and night. But she was very good and brave, and was always as cheerful as possible.

I was very glad to know that Mr. Carlyon was coming back, for it had troubled me a little to think that we might miss him; and I was anxious not to leave Bayfield without seeing him. Dr. Tressiter wished me to go to the sea; and, as mother's health also needed change, father had taken a large furnished house at St. Leonards for three months, and we were to go there in about ten days' time. Of course Sydney would accompany us, and Mardie and Rebecca and Mrs. Parkins, and some of the servants from St. Olave's Lodge. Mrs. Kennedy and Hallett were left in charge. Father would have to sleep two or three nights in town each week. He was intending to make some alteration in the house that required his personal supervision; besides which, one of the Bank directors was ill, and a good deal of business had devolved on him. Dear father, how he planned for our comfort. He certainly spared no expense or trouble. The horses were to be brought down for our use—even Bab; for he hoped that after a few weeks I should be strong enough to ride with him.

We were not to go back to Cheyne Walk for three whole months. I was rather sorry to hear this, for I wanted to spend Christmas at home. But father said that Aunt Cosie had promised to come to us, and that

we could make ourselves very happy at St. Leonards ; and then I felt more content.

I was surprised to find how unwilling I was to leave Bayfield ; but when Sydney came home we were certainly rather cramped for space. Prior's Cot was not a large house, and but for mother's excellent management we should hardly have been so comfortable. I think father found it small after the lofty, spacious rooms at St. Olave's Lodge ; but we knew how mother loved it.

As I grew stronger, father used to talk to me about the alterations he was planning at St. Olave's Lodge. I wanted to give up my dear corner room to mother, but he would not hear of it. He said that the room which we had always kept for visitors was equally large and cheerful ; and then he told me that he intended to turn the old schoolroom into a boudoir or morning-room for her use.

These talks were delightful to me ; but we always stopped when mother came into the room. I think she guessed the purport of our conversation, for she never questioned us ; she seemed to leave everything to father. I never heard her express a wish about anything, or object to any arrangement he proposed. I used to wonder if she would mind leaving Prior's Cot, for she never even mentioned the subject. But one Sunday evening as we three were sitting together in the twilight, father suddenly mooted the point.

'There will be no need for you to give up Prior's Cot, Yvonne,' he said. 'It has struck me more than once that as you are so attached to the place, you and the girls might like to come down for a week or two now and then.'

'Are you sure you will not mind ?' And something in mother's voice thrilled me. 'Thank you, Philip, for

thinking of it. I should be very sorry to part with it'; and then she laid her hand on his for a moment. It was the first approach to a caress I had yet noticed. It was too dark to see father's face, but there was quite a long silence before any one spoke again.

I was still far from strong, and perhaps Sydney's piece of news rather excited me, for I slept a little restlessly that night, and mother found fault with my looks the next morning. But I soon convinced her that there was nothing wrong; and then father drove us out as usual, and the fresh, sweet air soon restored me.

As we passed the Vicarage, I was glad to think that the twins would be sleeping in their cots that night; and by some transmission of thought mother turned to me and said: 'Has Sydney told you, Githa, that Mr. Carlyon is expected home to-morrow?' And as I nodded, she continued, 'We shall have him in church on Sunday. I shall be very glad of that.' But I forget what answer I made.

I had certainly not expected to see Mr. Carlyon the very day after his return, but he came. As it happened, I was quite alone. Father had gone up to town for the day, and had taken Sydney with him, as she wanted to spend a few hours with Aunt Cosie.

Mother and I had had a lovely drive that morning, and at luncheon she had announced her intention of calling at St. Helen's Towers. Lady Wilde had returned from Scarborough a few days previously, and Dr. Neale had told mother that she was still far from well.

'I think it will be only kind and neighbourly to call,' mother had observed; 'and though it is not a pleasant duty, I may as well get it over. But I shall

not be long, and you may expect me back to tea'; and then she established me cosily on the couch, and bade me read myself to sleep; but I did nothing of the kind.

It was one of those delicious October days, when the air is as mellow as old wine. The room was full of sunshine and flowers, and through the open window there was a faint, aromatic perfume of burning wood. The stillness was so soothing that I fell into a sort of daydream, and my thoughts had wandered so far that it was a little difficult to recall them when Mardie announced a visitor. I had not heard the name, and then to my surprise I saw it was Mr. Carlyon.

He came across the room so quickly that I had no time to rouse myself.

'Was I wrong to come in?' he asked, taking my hand and looking at me rather anxiously. 'Your maid told me that Mrs. Darnell was out, but that she was coming back shortly; and I could not deny myself the pleasure of seeing you.'

'Oh no, and she will be so glad to see you,' I stammered; 'she has only gone to St. Helen's Towers.' Why was it I felt so suddenly shy and stupid? I was so glad to see him, only I could not tell him so.

'I am afraid I have startled you,' he said, a little gravely. 'I can see you are far from strong yet'; and then I knew that he too was shocked at the change in me—that he had not realised before how ill I had been. He looked so troubled that my courage returned.

'Please sit down,' I said shyly; 'no, you will not tire me,' as he hesitated. 'I was not asleep, and I would far rather talk'; and then I asked him after his friend, and after that I felt more comfortable.

He answered my questions briefly. His friend was better, and he had brought him home; and then he asked me very kindly about myself.

'I was not quite happy about you when I went away, and your mother's letters made me rather anxious.' She had written to him more than once then. 'Grenville's account was a bit hazy, and he always said you were better.'

'Oh, I shall soon be quite well now,' I returned, and then I added a little breathlessly: 'You know that things have come right, and, oh, I am so happy!'

'Yes,' he returned in a low voice, 'I gathered as much from your mother's letters. I think I need not tell you how glad I am for all your sakes; good has come out of evil, and you have not suffered in vain'; and after this we had quite a long talk.

He was so afraid of tiring me that he wished to break off more than once, but I assured him that it did me good. Somehow his presence seemed to rest me—he was so quiet and so kind and sympathetic; he was very wise, too, for he would not let me dwell on my illness.

'You must forget past troubles, and only remember that God has been very good to you'; and then he said some very beautiful and helpful things, but I will not write them down. And through it all I knew that he understood, and that he had been very sorry for me.

'I have not forgotten you in my prayers,' he said, 'and I shall certainly not fail to remember you in my thanksgiving'; and something in his look seemed to calm me. 'Now, as your mother is unexpectedly detained, I must go, and you must promise me to rest.'

'Oh yes, I can rest now.' Did my face say more

than my words? for he regarded me very earnestly for a moment, as though he would say something. Then he checked himself, and with a low 'God bless you,' left the room; but, after all, I could not rest for wondering what that look had meant.

CHAPTER XXXIX

A GOLDEN HOUR

‘I have sinned,’ she said,
‘And not merited
The gift He gives, by the grace He sees !
The mine-cave praiseth the jewel ! the hillside praiseth the star !
I am viler than these.’

E. B. BROWNING.

The fineness which a hymn or psalm affords
Is, when the soul unto the lines accords.

HERRICK.

WHEN mother returned half an hour later she seemed much disappointed at missing Mr. Carlyon. She had stayed at St. Helen’s Towers longer than she had intended, as she had found Lady Wilde so low and depressed that she had not liked to hurry away.

‘She seemed quite glad to see me, Githa,’ she went on, ‘and thanked me more than once for coming. She is certainly very changed and broken, and when she said her troubles had made an old woman of her, she undoubtedly spoke the truth.’

‘Then you talked of Thurston !’ in some surprise.

‘Not exactly ! I certainly mentioned his name once. I said that your father seemed quite satisfied with his steady application to business ; but I do not remember that she made any response—only a few

minutes later she said rather bitterly that her troubles had added ten years to her age. "I am an old woman, my dear Mrs. Darnell, and the sooner I have done with life the better"; but something in her manner warned me not to pursue the subject. She asked after you very kindly, Githa, and she talked a good deal about the Etheridges. Mrs. Etheridge had been very ill again, and it was probable that they would winter in Bath. They were coming up to London shortly for a week or two.'

'I suppose she mentioned Rhona?'

'Oh yes; most affectionately. She seems really much attached to the girl. She said that she would like to have her to stay at St. Helen's, only she thought it kinder not to ask her; and I could not help agreeing with her. I should think St. Helen's Towers the worst possible environment for the poor girl.'

Mother asked a few questions about Mr. Carlyon after this. 'Your talk does not seem to have tired you, Githa, for you have quite a nice colour; we shall soon have you looking like your old self'; and there was a satisfied expression on mother's face as she moved to the tea-table.

I had been so absorbed in my own experience that I had hardly talked at all about the children to Mr. Carlyon. I had merely asked after them and sent my love to Stella, and my conscience rather pricked me for my selfishness.

I was speaking of my remissness to Sydney the next morning as we sat at our work. Mother had only just left the room when she reappeared smiling.

'I have brought some visitors to see you, Githa,' she said, with greater animation than usual. To my surprise Mr. Carlyon followed her, leading the twins.

I shall never forget the strange contrast between the tall grey-haired man, with his stately bearing, and those two small, sunburnt creatures clinging so closely to him. For once in her life Stella seemed shy. Instead of springing into my arms with a shout of glee, she rested her winsome little face against her father's coat-sleeve, and peeped at me under her eyelashes. I put down my work and held out my arms to her.

'Why, Stella darling, surely you have not forgotten me in this short time!' I said reproachfully; but she only advanced a few paces and shook her curls.

'Boy said we was to be very good, and not touch you; 'cos if we hugged you too much you might break into little pieces.'

'Girlie broke up into little pieces,' murmured Cyril in his cherubic way.

It was impossible not to laugh at this droll speech. As usual, Stella was embellishing her father's injunction after her own fancy. As he explained afterwards, his actual words had been: 'Now, children, you must be very good if I take you to see Miss Darnell. She has been very ill, and you must not climb up on her lap and tire her.'

Our laugh seemed to encourage Stella, and a roguish twinkle came into her eyes. 'If I don't kiss you hard, you won't crumble up into nasty little bits, will you, Girlie dear?' she asked sweetly; but I suppose my look was reassuring, for the next moment both the children were beside me, with their little arms round my neck, half strangling me, 'because we do love our Girlie so much, don't we, Cyril?' added Stella.

Mother said afterwards that it was one of the prettiest sights she had ever seen. 'The children were such darlings, with their pretty, loving little ways; and you

looked such a child yourself, Githa. I thought Mr. Carlyon seemed quite touched, though he was a little grave, too. I expect he was thinking of poor Lady Doreen.'

After this the children came every day to see me, though they were never allowed to stay long. Sometimes Cyril brought his beloved Golliwog to cheer me up, and on another occasion a wee rabbit. This was rather an exciting visit, as Bunny escaped into the garden and made his way into mother's pet fernery, and from thence into the Wilderness, where he had nearly disappeared for good and all, had not Sydney succeeded in capturing him. Both the children were in tears by that time, and their joy at recovering Bunny was so great and overpowering that mother dismissed them rather hurriedly, and Sydney took them home. When she returned she told us with much amusement that they had met Mr. Carlyon at the Vicarage gate, and that Stella had proposed to him that they should all go to church and say some nice prayers, because dear Bunny was safe. 'And we might say "All things bright and beautiful"; that is quite our best and nicest hymn, Boy. Cyril and me are so dreadfully happy that we must shout something.'

'I wonder what Mr. Carlyon said to that.'

'Oh, you know his way,' returned Sydney. 'He never lets them see how their queer speeches amuse him. He told Stella that it was a very good idea, but that he was too busy for a service just then, and he thought they had better sing their hymn in the nursery after they had restored the rabbit to its hutch. "And we will have out our flags," went on Stella, "and wave them all the time we sing, and put on our nighties, and then we shall be choir boys, Cyril." But I could not wait to hear more.'

I saw Mr. Carlyon frequently during those ten days, but I was never alone with him. More than once he had tea with us, and another time he came later in the evening to see father. He and mother became great friends. She always appeared so much more like her old self when he talked to her, and father seemed to enjoy his society. I do not remember that he said much to me during the visits, but he was always quietly observant of my comfort. Once he brought me some flowers, and another day a book from his library, which he recommended me to read, and he would say some little word to me which showed he thought of me. Sydney said more than once how kind he was. 'He always speaks to you so gently, Githa, as though he knew how much you had suffered ; and then he is so nice to Aunt Yvonne.'

I was very sorry to bid him good-bye, and I thought it no harm to tell him so ; but his smile in return was a little grave. 'It will not be for long, I hope,' he said quietly. 'If it were not selfish, I would say I am sorry too ; but if you will only get well and strong, you will make us all very happy.' I thought it so kind of him to say that, and something in his look told me he meant it. I felt a little dull that evening, but I hoped no one noticed it.

We speedily settled down to our seaside life, and as soon as I had recovered from the fatigue of the journey there was no question of my rapid progress. I gained flesh and colour, left off my invalid ways, and was in the air as much as possible. The sense of returning health and strength was delicious, and life again became joyous to me. After a week or two I was well enough to resume my rides with father ; a horse was hired for Sydney's use, and we all three rode constantly together.

When father went up to town we took long drives with mother ; it was a source of great happiness to us all to see how her health improved. She resumed her old active habits one by one. We heard frequently from Mr. Carlyon : he always wrote to mother. He used to tell her about her pensioners and sick people. As soon as Ada Martin was well enough to be moved he had established her and her mother in a cottage quite close to the village green. Noah's Ark was to be pulled down, he wrote, and two other cottages had been condemned. He generally added a few words about the children, and sent me a kind message. I think mother and I always enjoyed those letters.

I used to wonder sometimes if mother were really happy, for at times she was strangely absent, and seemed buried in thought ; and she had never yet lost the sad look in her eyes.

One afternoon we were alone together—father and Sydney had gone for a long walk, and it was dark before they returned. We were sitting in the firelight, each busy with our own thoughts, when, happening to glance in her direction, I was struck by this look of sadness on her face ; the next moment our eyes met. I thought she started slightly.

'What is it, Githa? Why do you look at me so intently, my child?'

'I was only wondering if you were quite content and happy,' I returned wistfully ; 'sometimes you look so sad, mother, and then I get troubled and fancy things.' Then mother turned in her quick way.

'You must not watch me so closely, Githa. My darling,' as I drew back a little hurt by her tone, 'I do not mean to repel you—I know it is only your loving anxiety on my account ; you and I must not

shut our hearts to each other again, but there are things one cannot well explain. I am not unhappy, dearest—in the sense you mean—and yet there are times when I am very sad.'

'But why, dear mother, when we all love you so?' Then she sighed deeply.

'Perhaps that is the reason,' she returned in a low voice; 'if I were more worthy of my present happiness, I should be less sad at heart, and the shadows of the past would not close so thickly round me. Githa, my child, in this life we must reap the harvest of our own sowing, and only the Divine Hand can "restore to us the years that the locust hath eaten"'; and there was the old bitterness in her voice.

I slipped my hand into hers. I wanted her to realise, without words, how entirely I understood and felt for her.

My mother's complex nature had ceased to be a sealed book that I could neither open nor read; since that day when her indomitable will yielded to her maternal love and fear, she was no longer an enigma or a mystery to me. Every day I seemed to grow nearer to her; and as my awe lessened, my love increased.

My intuition gave me the right clue now.

'Mother,' I whispered presently, 'I think I understand. You have forgiven father, and that is why you are happy; but you are sad too, because you have not forgiven yourself.'

She looked at me in some surprise.

'How could you guess that, Githa? You are young to have such thoughts; but it is true, dear child—God knows it is true. If I live to old age—if the years of my life were to be many and full of blessing—I should still carry about with me the shadow of a grievous

mistake, for which I could never, never forgive myself'; and she sighed heavily.

'Dear mother—dearest mother!' and at my tone her arms closed round me.

'Do not fret, darling; it is better so. Some of us must "work out our own salvation with fear and trembling." If we break the law of love, and fail in charity to our brethren, we deserve to suffer; but God has been so merciful, Githa, and He has given you back to me, my blessing'; and then for a little while we held each other silently. But that night and ever afterwards I added a new petition to my prayers—that my mother's noble but suffering heart might find rest.

It seemed to me that the weeks passed rapidly, and that very little happened to break their pleasant routine; but I must recall one little episode which might have ended sadly.

We were going to ride that morning, and father and I were standing on the steps waiting for the horses to be brought round, when we saw a motor-car coming round the corner, and at the same instant a small child, leading another still smaller, was crossing the road; there was a dog with them. It was all so instantaneous that I scarcely knew what happened. Father rushed into the road; some one screamed—I think it was Sydney; a bicycle had come from somewhere and had collided with the motor; the dog was yelping—the children crying—father was nowhere. As I flew down the steps, he rose from the ground; he had a child tucked under his arm.

'It is all right, Gipsy!' he exclaimed, as he saw my scared face. 'Don't be frightened; no one is killed or even hurt; only this gentleman's bicycle is damaged, I am afraid.'

'It was a near shave, sir,' observed the young man civilly; 'the motor prevented my seeing you, or I would have stopped sooner. I believe the dog was run over, but he is more frightened than hurt.'

Father nodded and laughed. He waited to give the children pennies and to pat the dog; then he went back with me to the house to brush the dust from his clothes.

'Father,' I panted, 'you might have been killed when that bicycle knocked you and the child down. I don't know how you escaped.'

Father made a wry face. 'Well, neither do I, Gip; but the little brats are safe, and I am glad I risked it. As my friend the cyclist remarked, "it was a near shave."'

We went up the steps arm in arm. Father was trying to laugh it off; but when he saw mother's face he grew suddenly grave. She was white as death, and seemed hardly able to support herself.

'I am not hurt, Yvonne,' he said, putting his arm round her. 'I only had a roll in the dust, and tore my coat. Shut the door, some one; there seems quite a little crowd collecting, and I don't feel exactly presentable.'

I don't know what mother said to him, she spoke so low; but I saw her put her hand on his shoulder, and then he kissed her.

We had a lovely ride, which we all enjoyed; but I thought father was a little quiet and thoughtful. Later in the afternoon mother asked me if I would like to go with her to Evensong, or if I would be too tired; but of course I denied this—I always loved to accompany her. We were both a little surprised when father said he should come too; but I saw mother flush as

though she were pleased. I always enjoyed Evensong at St. Matthias, but never more than I did that afternoon when father was with us.

I had made him pass into the seat before me, and he sat between us. I am sure we all felt it was a thanksgiving service.

There were only a few worshippers that evening. The partially-lighted nave and the long, shadowy aisles served to deepen the sense of devotion and awe ; a vague consciousness of silent presences seemed to thrill me ; the boys' sweet voices chanting the Magnificat were quite seraphic.

When the service was over we lingered awhile. The choristers were going to practise their anthem for the following Sunday, and we generally stayed to listen to them.

To my surprise it was father's favourite, which I had often sung to him on Sunday evenings at St. Olave's Lodge. 'Oh, rest in the Lord, wait patiently for Him and He will give thee thy heart's desire.' I glanced at father, but he was looking at mother. Was it my fancy that in the dim light her hand moved slowly to meet his? Oh, that Evensong at St. Matthias was always a sweet memory to me ; it was one of those golden hours which come to us in life and seem to link earth with heaven.

CHAPTER XL

'I HAVE BROUGHT YOUR MISTRESS HOME'

Never had man more joyful day than this,
Whom heaven would hepe with bliss.
Make feast therefore now all this livelong day ;
This day for ever to me holy is.

SPENSER.

SOME days after this mother told us a very pleasant piece of news—Thurston was to spend Christmas with us, and to stay until after the New Year.

'Your father wishes it,' she continued, addressing me; 'he says Thurston needs a change; that he is looking thin and peaky, and that a little sea air will do him good.'

'And when does he come?' I asked, for Sydney remained silent. She was sketching some little fishing-boats which had taken her fancy, but I saw that her pencil was idle—the unexpected news had evidently deprived her of the power of speech; but I saw her shield her face with her hand to hide her tell-tale flush.

'Your father has arranged that he is to bring Mrs. Bevan down with him. I believe they are to arrive the day before Christmas Eve, and you will be glad to hear that Ben is to come too.' Sydney made some

excuse to leave the room after this—I think she wanted bread-crumbs or some such trifle. I took advantage of her brief absence to ask mother if she were pleased that Thurston was coming.

'Oh yes, I shall be very glad to see him,' she returned cordially; 'and the poor boy certainly deserves a holiday, for he has been working well all these months. I feel I can trust them both, Githa. Thurston knows that there can be no question of an engagement for six months at least, so he is bound in honour not to speak to Sydney until we give him leave. They are both on their probation at present; but Thurston has behaved so well that I do not think either your father or I would wish to put him to too severe a test.'

I was delighted to hear her say this, and I rejoiced that Sydney should have this unexpected happiness. I knew how she had missed Thurston, and how she had longed to see him; and that with all her brave efforts it was not always easy for her to be cheerful.

'Are you glad, Sydney dear,' I asked rather mischievously, when I found myself alone with her that day—'are you glad that Thurston is coming to stay with us?' But she answered with her usual sweet composure.

'Of course I am, Githa, and I think it was so dear and kind of Uncle Philip to ask him'; for Sydney always called father by that name now. He had suggested it as less formal than Mr. Darnell—'besides, I consider myself your adopted uncle now,' he had once said; for he and Sydney were the best of friends.

We were all delighted to see Aunt Cosie and Thurston; and as father had prophesied, we spent a very happy Christmas.

I thought Thurston greatly improved: he had gained in manliness and looked older; he was handsomer than ever, though certainly rather thin and worn, and it was a little sad to see a line or two on his forehead—he was young to have such traces of care and anxiety.

It was touching to see him and Sydney together, their delight in each other's society was so great. They were always together. If Sydney were absent from the room for more than a few minutes, Thurston was restless until she returned, and with the freemasonry of love they seemed to understand each other without the medium of words.

Mother left them perfectly free. She never did things by halves. When she trusted any one she did so absolutely and entirely. So she never expressed surprise or disapproval when she saw Thurston and Sydney walking up and down on the sea front with only Ben to chaperone them, or noticed, as she probably did, that during our rides they were generally some little distance in the rear. Father would have his joke sometimes, but mother never made any comment. They were both so natural and simple, so frankly absorbed in each other, and so unfeignedly happy, that I have seen mother look at them until the tears came into her eyes.

It was during this visit that Thurston took heart of grace and went down to Bayfield to see his grandmother; but his mission was not successful.

I was not in the room when he returned, but Sydney told me all about it.

Thurston had confessed to her and mother that he had been much struck by the change in his grandmother's appearance. She seemed to him to have aged

considerably during these few months. For the first moments he thought that she was pleased to see him. He had entered unannounced, so as to take her by surprise, and she had turned suddenly pale and put out her hand to him, and had let him kiss her on the cheek, but after a little she relapsed into the old hard, dry manner. The first remark was certainly not reassuring. She hoped he had come to his senses, and that this unlooked-for visit was to tell her so. But he had evaded this.

"I trust I am welcome, Gran," Thurston had said, in his most conciliatory manner. "We have not met for so long that I hoped you would be a little kind to me." But she had answered him with the old imperiousness.

"I shall be always glad to see my grandson when he has learnt to behave himself, and to apologise for past misconduct"; and then his grandmother went on to tell him that his rooms were always kept in readiness for him, and that his horses were in the stable.

"I am a weak old woman, Thurston," she went on, and her voice was less harsh, "but you are all the kith and kin that remains to me. If you will only accept my conditions and make peace with that poor, injured girl, things shall be as they always have been between us, and I will never reproach you for leaving my roof."

'Of course I could not tell her that,' Thurston said afterwards to Sydney; 'but it cut me to the heart to hear her speak so kindly. I felt then that she really cared for me, and wanted me back, but that her will was too obstinate to yield.

'I tried to be patient and make her see things in their true light,' he continued, 'but it was no use, and

when Gran saw that nothing would induce me to change my mind about Rhona, she got every moment more angry and bitter. It was no use staying; she would only have excited and made herself ill. So I went away. I just went round to the stables to see old Rufus and the Major, and, of course, the dogs were so wild with joy that we could scarcely bring them to order.

'I had luncheon at the Vicarage. I went to see Laddie and to have a talk with Mr. Carlyon, and he was very kind, and went with me to the station.'

'Do you know what Mr. Carlyon said to Thurston?' I asked Sydney.

'No, he only said that Mr. Carlyon was very sympathetic, and sorry for his disappointment, and had begged him not to lose hope.

"Your grandmother was pleased to see you that first moment," Mr. Carlyon had added; "you may depend upon it that her heart secretly yearns after you. You must give her time, my dear fellow. She has an obstinate nature, and it is not easy for her to yield, but one of these days her loneliness will be too much for her"; and then, to Thurston's surprise, he advised him to wait a few months and go again.'

Thurston seemed so cast down and out of spirits that evening that we were all very sorry for him, and tried our best to comfort him.

Mother was the most successful. She talked to him for a long time the next morning. He looked so much more cheerful when he rejoined me in the drawing-room that I could not help asking him if she had done him any good, and I was relieved when he replied in the affirmative.

Of course he asked where Sydney was—this was

always his first question. And when I told him she was writing a letter for Aunt Cosie, he condescended to tell me a little about his talk with mother.

'Mrs. Darnell was awfully kind,' he observed. 'She gave me a lot of good advice, and then she told me that they would always expect me to spend my Sundays at St. Olave's Lodge, unless I had some other engagement; that Mr. Darnell wished it; and that she wished it too. Oh, she could not have been kinder, Githa. I shall not mind the week's work half so much now that I shall be able to look forward to those Sundays.' Poor, dear Thurston, he certainly looked happier after that.

We were all very sorry to lose Thurston when his visit came to an end, but as we were to leave St. Leonards in another three weeks, we should soon see him again. Aunt Cosie stayed for another week, and then she went back and took Sydney with her, to stay at Fairlawn until we were all settled in at St. Olave's. It was just like Aunt Cosie to think of the right thing; her wise head and kind heart told her that it was better for Sydney to be away just then, and that I should be alone with my parents.

I had had a very pleasant time at St. Leonards, but I was glad to be going home. I used to wake up in the morning with such a happy beating at my heart to think of mother being there too. It must have been nearly sixteen years since she left St. Olave's, and I wondered how she would feel when she saw it again. But she never spoke of it, or alluded in any way to the home-coming; only, as the time grew nearer, she became more silent and abstracted.

We were all very busy the last few days. There were no more rides, for the horses had gone back to

London. We went to St. Matthias the last evening, but that time mother and I were alone.

I think we were all a little nervous the next morning, and rather avoided each other's society. Mother shut herself in her own room with the pretence of finishing her packing; father had some business letters to write; and Roy and I wandered up and down the Parade.

We were to start after an early luncheon, and I remember that none of us ate much.

When we reached the station father, as usual, bought papers and magazines to beguile the journey, and, of course, we each took one; but I do not think mother turned a single page of her magazine. Father buried himself in his *Times*, but when I glanced at him now and then he did not seem to be reading; there was a puckered line on his forehead, as though he were deep in thought.

I felt thankful when the journey was at an end and we were driving from the station. Father spoke to mother once or twice in a low voice, but she scarcely answered him. She had grown very pale, and when we came in sight of St. Olave's Lodge her lips were so white that I thought she was going to faint. She must have noticed how concerned I looked, for she slightly shook her head.

When the carriage stopped I saw the door was open, and Hallett and Mrs. Kennedy were awaiting us. Father offered his arm to mother, but as she took it she paused a moment and held out her hand to me. My intuition told me what she wished: she would enter her old home between her husband and child.

I have only a vague recollection of the next few

minutes. I heard father say rather quickly: 'I have brought your mistress home, Hallett'; then mother shook hands with him and Mrs. Kennedy; and after that father took mother into the drawing-room, but I did not at once follow them. When I did so, I saw her sitting in an easy chair by the fire, with her bonnet and furs laid aside. I went up and kissed her, and then I saw there were tears in her eyes. But before I had time to whisper how glad—how very glad—I was, father asked me to pour out the tea; but he would not let me wait on mother: he took the cup from my hand and carried it to her himself.

Mother recovered herself after a time, and a little colour came back to her face. Then father told her that he should take her to her room, and that she must rest and be quiet until dinner.

'Gipsy must come too,' he added, in his kind way. And then I knew he wanted me to see what he had done.

The rooms were so changed by their new decorations and furniture that I hardly knew where I was. The old schoolroom had been transformed into a charming boudoir.

Everything was so beautiful—there was such evidence of loving thought in every arrangement—that I could not help crying a little, and I went outside for a moment to compose myself.

It was then that I heard mother say: 'The rooms are perfect, Philip; but why have you been so good to me? I do not deserve it.'

And then I heard his answer: 'Because I wanted you to be sure of your husband's welcome, Yvonne, my love.' But the next moment I stole softly away.

I think we were all very happy that evening, although we were so quiet and talked little. After dinner I played to them, and they sat hand in hand and listened to me. I played mother's favourite pieces from Chopin, and then I strayed into an anthem or two. Was it some subtle instinct that made me finish with the anthem that we had heard at St. Matthias: 'Oh, rest in the Lord, wait patiently for Him, and He will give thee thy heart's desire'? As I played the last chord, father came softly behind me and kissed my hair.

'My little blessing,' he whispered, 'you must often play that to me.' And then I saw he was alone: mother had left the room.

When Sydney came to us a week later she seemed quite surprised to find how comfortably we had settled down into the new life.

'Aunt Yvonne seems as much at home as though she had been here for years,' she observed to me in a tone that expressed her amazement. Mother's quiet serenity seemed to perplex Sydney; but I only smiled and left the remark unanswered.

It was no mystery to me. I knew mother had braced herself to perform a difficult task with the whole force of her strong will, and that she was not likely to fail.

The very next morning she had spoken to me of her intention to take the reins of household management in her own hands; she knew how willing I was to give them up. She was a born ruler, and before many days were over Mrs. Kennedy and Hallett had succumbed to her influence.

There was something queenly in the way she

moved and spoke that seemed to fascinate them. She had such a clear, concise manner of giving her orders that no one could misunderstand her meaning for a moment, and she was so tolerant of their opinions and so thoughtful for their comfort that the old servants soon lost their hearts to her.

Mardie told me once in an amused voice that Hallett had remarked to her, that his new mistress was the grandest lady that he had ever seen: 'She is what I call a noble figure of a woman, though she is none so young-looking with her white hair.' And then Mrs. Kennedy had chimed in, that she was a clever lady, and that it was a pleasure to work under a person who knew how to appreciate good cooking.

'You see, Miss Githa,' persisted Mardie, 'Mrs. Kennedy was a bit set-up that day because the mistress had praised her savouries.'

Mother smiled when I repeated this to her, but I think she was pleased too. 'I want them to like me,' she said quite seriously; 'they are such faithful, good creatures, and have done their duty all these years.' But I knew why the old sadness came into her eyes that moment. She was thinking of 'the years the locust hath eaten'; when her place had been vacant, and the shadow of that long misunderstanding had darkened her husband's home.

CHAPTER XLI

MY WOMAN'S HERITAGE

Take heed thou bless the day on which Love took possession of thee, for thou oughtest so to do.—DANTE.

WHILE we were at St. Leonards father told me that my mother had expressed a great wish that my portrait should be painted, and that on our return to town he intended to have it done.

He had given the commission to a young artist in whom he was much interested. 'Barton is a clever fellow,' he explained to me; 'he has plenty of talent, and will make his mark yet; but at the present moment he is rather in low water. He was foolish enough to get married six months ago, and they have not a penny between them. Dorothy Barton is one of the prettiest girls I ever saw; but they are just a pair of infatuated infants, and their knowledge of the world is nil. He paints pot-boilers and charming little sketchy things; but he is very anxious to get a picture into the Royal Academy. He says if he could only paint a good portrait he might get other orders; so we will give him a helping hand, Gipsy.'

I was very much interested in this description of

father's protégé, and a few days after we had returned to St. Olave's he took me to Mr. Barton's studio to arrange about the sittings. We spent a very pleasant afternoon. The little bride made tea for us in the studio—such a bare, ugly place it was—and I took quite a fancy to the pretty, childish little creature and the tall young artist with his clever, eager face.

We soon settled matters, and after that I went nearly every day to the studio. Either mother or Sydney accompanied me. We soon grew friendly with the Bartons, and Dorothy would often bring her work and keep us company. I quite enjoyed those sittings. Mr. Barton knew how to interest me, and as he was a rapid worker it was pleasant to watch his progress.

The picture would be a success—even father, who was rather a severe critic, allowed that. 'It is lifelike, Gipsy,' he would say, standing before it. But when it was finished, and I had the opportunity of studying it at my leisure, I thought it far too flattering.

Father had insisted on his painting me in my white chiffon dress, and Mr. Barton had filled my hands with loose, golden daffodils, which looked like yellow sunshine.

All the accessories of the picture were perfect; but could that girl with the deep, thoughtful eyes and those masses of golden brown hair be really Githa Darnell?

Something whispered to me that it was beautiful, but that it could not be true. 'It is far, far too good,' I said to mother afterwards. 'It may be like me, as you and father say—and I am very glad you are pleased and satisfied—in my opinion it is idealised.' But mother only smiled and shook her head.

'I don't want to make you vain, Githa, but we all think it a good likeness, and certainly not flattered.' And after that I thought it was best to say no more.

Mr. Barton always declared that that picture made his fortune. It certainly brought him plenty of orders for portraits. It was in the Royal Academy that May, and was well hung, and all our friends and acquaintances admired it greatly. One afternoon when the picture was near completion, I had gone to the studio that Mr. Barton might put some finishing touches—he was not satisfied with the hands, and wished to paint them again. It was not a long sitting, and when it was over Sydney proposed that we should have tea with Aunt Cosie, and so it was that we missed an unexpected visitor to St. Olave's Lodge, who had been waiting long for our return.

'Who do you think has been here, girls?' asked my mother, as we entered the drawing-room. But I did not need to be told; I knew very well.

'Actually Mr. Carlyon,' she went on. 'He was here for two hours; indeed he only left about half an hour ago. We were hoping every minute that you would come in, and so he stayed on. He seemed quite disappointed to miss you both.'

I wondered if he were half as disappointed as I was. I could not trust myself to reply. Sydney was protesting that it was all her fault; that she had asked me to go to Aunt Cosie's, and that if we had only gone straight home we should certainly have seen him; and then she asked the very question I was about to ask—how long he would be in town.

'He is only staying one night,' returned mother; 'he goes back to Bayfield to-morrow afternoon. Your

father came in before he left, and he wanted him to stay to dinner, but Mr. Carlyon had an engagement for the evening. They went off together. Your father said he would like a walk. They were going across the Park.'

'I wish we had come straight home, Githa,' repeated Sydney.

'He left kind messages for you both, and the twins had sent lots of love. Your father told him about the picture, Githa, and he said that he should certainly see it, as he hoped to come up in the middle of May for a week or fortnight. I thought he was looking extremely well—more so than I have ever seen him.'

The dressing-bell sounded just then, and Sydney and I hurried away. I had a dull, aching sense of disappointment all the evening. True, he would be here again in May; but that would be five or six weeks hence.

Mother petted me because she said I was tired, and that she would be glad when the sittings were at an end; and I was obliged to let her believe that they were the cause of my fatigue. Once or twice that evening I wondered if father were tired too; he was so quiet, and seemed plunged in a brown study, and I almost fancied there was an unusual shade on his face. I saw mother looking at him as though she noticed it too; but he would not allow that anything was wrong, and as I saw he did not care to be questioned, I asked Sydney to sing her prettiest songs to cheer him, for I could not sing that night. So I took a book and sat close to father, and slipped my hand under his arm; but though I turned the pages the story did not interest me: it was a stupid, improbable tale, I thought.

Of course Thurston came to us every Sunday—he always joined us in the church porch after service, and walked back with us. How he and Sydney enjoyed those Sundays! In the afternoons we generally took the dogs for a walk, and we always went round to the stables with some delicacy, in the shape of carrots or sugar, for the horses. After tea we had sacred music until church time. Sometimes when mother was tired, father or I would stay with her; but Sydney and Thurston never missed. Now and then we saw him in the course of the week, when we went to a theatre or concert—father always took a seat for him; so, on the whole, he and Sydney had a good time. They were so very happy that I am afraid I sometimes envied them a little; it seemed to me such a wonderful thing for two people to be all the world to each other. I could see that Thurston's ideas, his opinions and tastes, completely dominated Sydney. They seemed to think alike on most subjects. I wondered how I should feel if any one—— but I never would pursue this thought.

When the Royal Academy was open, of course we took Thurston to see the portrait, and he highly approved of it. Father always called it Titania. He had given it the name. He was immensely proud of it, and always enjoyed hearing our friends' opinions. I remember one of them, a very clever woman, commenting on the strange, far-away look in the eyes. 'I have never seen that expression on your face, Githa,' she said; 'it is as though you had seen some vision. It is not exactly sad, and yet some people might say so; but there is something indefinable and mysterious.' But I confess I hardly understood this.

I was thinking of Mrs. Brabazon's odd speech one

May afternoon as I sat at my embroidery by the open window. It was an ideal May day. The air was sweet with the pink and white hawthorn, and the river was sparkling in the sunshine—a day when it was good to be alive, and to thank God for youth and health and all the bounties of nature. I had had an early ride with father that morning, so when mother proposed going to Fairlawn, I told Sydney that I felt lazy, and wanted to get on with my work, and she good-naturedly offered herself in my stead.

Mother had been planning something very pleasant that morning. She had asked me if I should like to go down with her to Bayfield early in June, to spend a week or ten days at Prior's Cot. 'I thought it would be nice if you and I went by ourselves, Githa,' she went on, 'and then your father could come down for the week end.'

I had been charmed with this idea, and had given a very willing assent, and then I asked a little anxiously about Sydney and Thurston; but mother had already thought of that. 'I can give Mrs. Bevan a hint,' she returned. 'She will only be too glad to have Sydney, and I am quite sure she will invite Thurston for Sunday. I think we could spend a very happy week at dear little Prior's Cot, eh, Githa?' and mother looked at me wistfully, but my answer seemed to content her.

I dismissed Mrs. Brabazon's absurd speech, and after a time began to feast my mind on this delightful plan of mother's; and then the door-bell rang. But it was not father; it was far too early for him. 'Some tiresome visitor,' I said to myself quite peevishly, and the next moment Hallett announced Mr. Carlyon.

I was so startled that I could not at once collect my

thoughts. I heard myself telling him a little incoherently that I was very glad not to miss him this time, but that he would be sorry to hear that mother and Sydney had gone to Fairlawn ; but he let this pass. I thought he seemed very pleased to see me. His manner gave me that impression, for he certainly did not say so in words. But it also struck me that he was a little nervous, though it might have been my fancy.

‘I have been to the Royal Academy this morning,’ he said, a little abruptly, as he drew a chair nearer to me. ‘Of course I saw the picture.’ He spoke so meaningly that I knew he was alluding to the portrait ; but I did not like to ask what he thought of it. He smiled as though he read my face.

‘It is very lifelike. I have seen that expression more than once,’ in a low voice. ‘It is not given to all of us to see visions, but as I stood opposite that picture I seemed to understand much that would be a mystery to some people.’ How very strange for Mr. Carlyon to say that ! ‘For instance,’ he went on, ‘I heard some one behind me say that you looked rather sad, but I certainly did not share that opinion. I think,’ rather slowly and hesitatingly, ‘the dreamy look in the eyes recalled to me your father’s name for you—do you remember—Titania?’

He looked at me so intently as he said this that I could not answer. A sudden, overpowering sense of shyness took possession of me. I was fully aware that he had taken my hand, and that he was speaking to me in a voice which thrilled me with its gentleness and intense earnestness. It seemed to me that I heard every word, but that I could not grasp the meaning. I was in a dream, and it was all so wonderful and beautiful that I could not believe that it was true.

He was telling me that he cared for me too much for his peace of mind ; that from the first he had been drawn to me in a singular manner, as though there were some affinity between us ; that in some indefinable way I had reminded him of his lost Doreen. He went on to say that he had battled against this feeling, believing himself too old and too much saddled with responsibilities to be a fit mate for my youth, but that the struggle had been unavailing ; that in spite of his efforts he had grown to love me so dearly that his only chance of earthly happiness lay in winning my affection ; and here he paused a moment.

'I have talked to your father, Githa,' he went on. It was the first time he had called me by my name, and yet how naturally he said it. 'He has permitted me to speak to you, but I will tell you later on what he said. Just now I can only think of one thing—my dear one, have you any hope to give me? I would not hurry you for worlds, and if you would like a little time to consider your answer you shall have it, only do not keep me longer waiting than you can help.'

I found it very difficult to speak, but his anxiety was so evident that I contrived somehow to let him know that there was no need to wait, and that I was ready with my answer ; and then I broke down again. I had not thought that I could have been so shy with him. I think he saw how it was with me.

'You need not speak,' he said quietly. 'If you will look at me, I shall be able to read your answer for myself.'

I did so ; our eyes met, and then he kissed me.

We had a long, long talk after that—at least Mr. Carlyon talked and I listened. I never knew that he

could have said such things—and to think that he really meant them. It made me so proud and happy to hear what he thought of me, and yet it humbled me, too. I remember I told him that he must not think of me too highly; that I was very young and inexperienced, and made many mistakes; that I feared when he knew me better that I should often disappoint him. But he only smiled.

‘I think I know you well now,’ he returned gently; ‘and as for mistakes—do we not all make them, daily, even hourly? My darling, you need not try to depreciate yourself, for I love you, faults and all; but I never loved and revered you more than when I saw you battling so bravely with your trouble. Your unselfishness and filial devotion must have won my heart then if it had not been yours already’; and then he went on to tell me of his suspense and anxiety during my illness.

‘Grenville did not minimise the danger, dear. You see he had no idea how the land lay, or he would have softened things a bit. His letters used to make me so wretched, Githa. There were days when I was almost beside myself, thinking that I should lose you, and that for a second time my heart’s desire would be taken from me.’

It was after this that I asked him a little anxiously what father had said. He replied that he had been very kind, but had owned frankly that though there was no man whom he more respected and liked, and to whom he could trust his child with greater confidence, he thought I was too young to incur such responsibilities.

“If Githa returns your affection and consents to marry you, she will be a stepmother before she is out

of her teens." You see he did not want you to marry a widower, dearest ; and then, though I am not really old—only eight-and-thirty—there are twenty years between us.'

I saw Mr. Carlyon was a little sensitive about his age and grey hair and the children ; I think father had made him so. But I told him that none of these things troubled me ; that I never had thought him old, and that I did not want him to be a year younger ; and that I loved the children so dearly, that I had no fear of responsibilities if he would only help me. When I had whispered this, he put his hand on my head and said in an earnest voice that it would be one of the chief objects of his life to help me and make me happy. He spoke a little of Lady Doreen after this. It was I who mentioned her first. I felt a little more at my ease with him, and I wanted him to know that he need never be afraid of talking about her ; that I felt almost that she was a dear friend whose memory was sacred to me ; that I could never hear too much about her, and that he need not fear that I should ever have any unworthy and jealous feelings.

He seemed very much touched at this, and was just thanking me in such a nice way when father came into the room. He stopped abruptly when he saw us, and then turned very pale,

'You have made short work of it, Carlyon, I see,' he said in rather a quick, pained tone. 'So you have stolen my Gipsy.'

Then I went up to him and put my arms round his neck. 'Father, you have not really lost me,' I whispered. 'Nothing except death could ever really part us. If you had been alone, but now you have mother.' But there were tears in his dear eyes, and it did not

seem easy for him to speak. He held out his hand to Mr. Carlyon, and then he kissed me very tenderly. My poor, dear father, the idea of losing his Gipsy nearly broke his heart !

CHAPTER XLII

MENTOR CLOSES THE CHAPTER

The shadow of his presence made my world
A Paradise. All familiar things he touched—
All common words he spoke—became to me
Like forms and sounds of a diviner world.

SHELLEY.

I SHALL never forget how dear and good my mother was to me that evening. I think that, like father, she was rather taken by surprise when she saw Mr. Carlyon ; they had neither of them expected him so soon. But in spite of her evident emotion, the look that passed between them told me how absolute was her trust in him. As for Sydney, she positively beamed with delight, though she wisely reserved her ecstasies until we were alone together.

I was very much surprised to hear her say that she had for months expected this to happen, though she never hinted her surmise to any one.

‘I was sure that he cared for you,’ she went on. ‘I have seen him look at you in such a grave, intent way, and when you were speaking he would listen as though he feared to lose a word. He seemed to be utterly absorbed in you, but you never noticed. I knew then how it would end.’

Mr. Carlyon could not stay long with us that evening, but he promised to come early the next morning and take me out; and he was also to dine with us. As soon as we had settled this he took his leave, and I went out on the balcony to see the last of him. I wanted to escape to my own room to think over things; but mother followed me upstairs. 'You will let me talk to you a little, will you not, darling?' she said so tenderly, and she was so loving and gentle. She understood so thoroughly all I was feeling that she gave me a great deal of comfort. Father's depression had damped me a little; it seemed to wake me from my blissful dream! Had I been selfish in my intense happiness? Even at that moment the consciousness of Mr. Carlyon's love was filling me with indescribable pride and joy. That he should think me worthy of his affection; that he should choose me to share his life-work, and to comfort him for the loss of that sweet Lady Doreen! It was this that seemed to me such a miracle.

'I know all about it, Githa,' observed mother softly, as I hid my flushed face against her shoulder. 'You cannot realise your happiness—everything is new and strange; it is as though you were re-born into a new world.' Dear mother! had she felt that too?

'If only father would not be unhappy,' I whispered.

'He will not be long sad,' she returned in such a comforting way. 'You must give him time, darling, to get used to the idea of losing you. He was troubled at first when Mr. Carlyon spoke to him; he thought you too young to marry. I had to remind him, Githa, that I was your age—indeed a month or two younger—when I became his wife. I was a mother before I was nineteen; but he had not remembered that. I

think he hoped to have kept you for some years longer,' she went on; 'indeed he said as much to me. You have been so much to him, Githa; but I know him well enough to hope that when he sees your happiness his kind heart will be comforted. Now you must dry your eyes, my darling, for we must all be very happy to-night.' Dear, sweet mother, how unselfish she was! Not one word had she said of her own loss.

I found it impossible to talk much that evening, so mother asked Sydney to play to us, and I sat down on the couch by father. Mother was at the other end of the room, and we were virtually alone, and this gave me courage to ask him a question—did he think me unkind ever to wish to leave him? He moved quickly when I said this, and drew me closer to him.

'Unkind, Gip! why, of course not. I am only a selfish old fellow, who wants to keep his treasure to himself; but I was a fool to imagine that I should be able to have you safe for some years yet. I might have known that your mother's daughter would turn out a beauty, and that I was not likely to have much peace.'

'Dear father, what nonsense! but,' nestling closer to him, 'you do really like Mr. Carlyon?' I whispered the name.

'Yes, I like him tremendously, Gipsy; but, somehow, I never thought that my little girl would marry a grey-haired widower. Not that Carlyon is old—and he is a fine-looking fellow, too—but, hang it all, Gip, there are the twins!' And father's tone was so comical that I could not help laughing. Sydney was playing rather loudly, and no one heard me. But by-and-by I tried to make father understand that the thought of the children only added to my happiness—'I do love

them so.' And after this father said some very nice things about Mr. Carlyon.

'I tell you what, Gip,' he finished, 'I expect your mother spoke the truth when she said we should probably spend half our time at Prior's Cot when you are at the Vicarage.' But I would not let him enter on that; the very idea of the Vicarage being my home made me dizzy.

I was obliged to tell Mardie the news that night, though I was almost too tired to do so. The dear old thing was so pleased and proud that she could not help crying.

'But it is only with joy, Miss Githa,' she explained, 'to think that my dear young lady is to be married and to have a home of her own'; and then she cried again at the thought of how she would miss me. But I told her quite seriously that if I went to the Vicarage she must come too; and when she saw I really meant it, she said that she was as happy as a queen.

I did not sleep very well that night; I was over-excited and weary with happiness; but it was pleasant to lie awake in the quiet, restful darkness, and to whisper my thanksgiving for the great and priceless gift of a good man's love. I hardly dared to acknowledge to myself how I loved him. I had been so shy with him that day—so stupidly tongue-tied and embarrassed—but I knew he had understood; and how patient, how very patient, he had been with my childishness.

'I will try to be more like my old self when I see him again,' was my last waking thought when the grey light heralded the dawn of a new day. Mr. Carlyon came quite early; he seemed glad to find me alone. He asked me at once if I had slept well, and shook his

head rather gravely when I evaded the question. 'Those pale cheeks are sufficient answer,' he remarked; but they were not pale after that. He asked me if I should like to go out with him, and I said Yes, and we spent the greater part of the morning in Battersea Park. It was very quiet there and we found a retired nook, and then we had the loveliest talk, and I soon forgot my shyness, and we were very, very happy together.

That evening Aunt Cosie and Thurston dined with us, and I wore my white chiffon dress. I saw a quick flash in Mr. Carlyon's eyes as I approached him. He had brought me some flowers, and as he put them in my hand he whispered 'Titania,' and then added under his breath, 'Have you put on that dress for me, darling?' But he knew I had.

It was after this, as we stood together on the balcony to admire the moonlight on the water, that he told me that I must call him Paul. He seemed pleased when I confessed that it was a favourite name with me, and he would not be satisfied until he had heard it from my lips. It was a little hard to say it at first, but I soon got more used to it.

I saw him daily after this; he always came and took me out somewhere. We went to the Royal Academy together, and to Westminster Abbey and other places, and he generally came in the evening. One night mother asked the Pelhams to dinner. I had written to Reddy, and she had come to me at once and had brought me kind messages from Helen. She seemed very much struck with Paul, and told me seriously that she considered me a very fortunate girl. 'He is a head and shoulders taller than other men,' she observed, and of course I knew what she meant. It

was a very Claudian speech, but it conveyed a high compliment. Before Paul went back to Bayfield he induced father to consent that we should be married at the beginning of October. Father wanted us to wait until the spring, but Paul was a little masterful, and as he had first won mother over to his side he carried his point. I left them to settle matters. Even in those early days his word was a law to me, and he was so reasonable and unselfish that I knew I could rely implicitly on his judgment. Oh, how I grew to love him, my noble Paul! But I will not speak of that. After all, mother carried out her plan; but instead of a fortnight we spent a whole month at Prior's Cot, and father came down for the week end, from Friday until Monday. Sydney kept him company at St. Olave's, and she and Thurston spent their Sundays with Aunt Cosie.

We had a lovely time, mother and I, and every hour that Paul could snatch from his parish work was spent with us. As for the children, they ran in and out at all hours. They grew very much attached to mother, and always called her the Lady—a name that greatly amused us.

Paul was exceedingly busy; he was planning all sorts of changes at the Vicarage. One or two of the rooms were to be refurnished, and he was very anxious for mother's opinion. He would have liked if possible to have built a new wing, but mother dissuaded him from this idea. 'It can always be done later,' she said very wisely; 'and you can stay at Prior's Cot while the alterations are going on.' And Paul acted on this advice.

The stables had to be enlarged, and horse-boxes prepared for my dear Bab, and the new horses which were to be father's wedding present to Paul.

Paul was a richer man than I knew. He had a good private income, but since Lady Doreen's death he had lived very quietly. The money that father would give me was, as Paul insisted, to be entirely for my use. I am afraid I took very slight interest in these matters; even my trousseau would have been of little importance if I had not known that Paul would take pleasure in all my pretty things. Of course I loved his presents, not because they were so costly and beautiful, but because they were the tokens of his love.

It was while we were at Bayfield that we heard a very sad piece of news which shocked us greatly.

When Paul came over to the cottage one morning I thought he looked unusually grave. Mother was in the room, and as soon as he had greeted us, he said that he had something very sad to tell us, and that he knew how grieved Sydney and I would be; and then he told us that poor, dear Rhona was dead.

I shall never forget how shocked we were. Lady Wilde had only heard from her a few days previously. She had written quite cheerfully. They were just going to stay with her uncle, Sir William Etheridge, at Overdean Grange, a beautiful place on the borders of Hampshire.

I knew how Rhona loved staying at the Grange. Sir William had married twice, and there was a young family—girls and boys of all ages. Rhona had often talked to us about them; and the youngest boy, Billy, was a special favourite of hers.

Paul had just been to St. Helen's Towers, and had found Lady Wilde much upset by the news. He gave us full particulars. Rhona's death was the result of an accident. There was a piece of water not far from the

house, which was called the lake. It was in rather a secluded spot, and was in reality a deep, large pond, closed in rather prettily with a bosky thicket. Billy, who had a new sailing-boat, had asked Rhona to accompany him to the pond, as his nurse was busy, and he was never allowed to go near the pond alone.

There was a little bit of woodwork projecting into the water, from which Billy always launched his boat. No one exactly knew how it happened, for Billy's account was somewhat vague—'that he felled in and caught his leg in the string,' was all Billy could tell them. It could only be supposed that in her frantic efforts to catch hold of the child, Rhona must have overbalanced herself and fallen into the water. The pond was deep and her clothes were heavy. A keeper and his dog, passing a few minutes later, saw what he supposed to be poor Billy's corpse drifting towards the creek; but happily the child had only lost consciousness. Poor Rhona was dead before she was brought out of the water.

'I am sure they must be right in thinking that the poor girl overbalanced herself,' continued Paul. 'She must have known how deep the water was by the little pier, and they say she could not swim. She would hardly have been reckless enough to jump in at the risk of her life.' And mother endorsed this opinion.

But I could not be sure of this. I knew that Rhona was constitutionally timid, that she was hardly the sort of person to do a heroic action; but at a sudden crisis even timid natures can rise to an emergency. Rhona was very fond of Billy; she could hardly see the child drowning before her eyes without trying to save him. It was quite possible that she waded into the water a little lower down, and then got

out of her depth, and was unable to save herself. Poor, gentle, loving Rhona, with her colourless life and disappointed hopes, how I wept for her that day! And yet for her, was it not as well that the fairer life had dawned, and that her sweet spirit was at rest?

'This will make a great difference to Thurston,' mother said to me later in the day. 'Now that poor child is no longer the bone of contention, there may be some hope of reconciliation between him and his grandmother.' And, as usual, mother was right.

On our return from Bayfield, Thurston and Sydney were definitely engaged; but it was not until after our marriage that Lady Wilde could be induced to forgive her grandson. But she was old and broken, and Paul was very eloquent. By the middle of November everything was settled. Lady Wilde had promised to recognise the engagement, and Thurston had acceded to her wish to give up his work at the Bank and to go back to St. Helen's Towers. In the late spring it was to be Sydney's home, too. Lady Wilde had implored Thurston not to leave her again.

'You shall have your own apartments, and I will be good to your wife,' she said to him; 'and after my death it will all be yours.' And Thurston had reluctantly consented to this; there was nothing else for him to do, as he observed to us rather ruefully.

After all, things turned out much better than we had dared to expect. Lady Wilde grew very fond of Sydney; as time went on she became more and more of an invalid, and they rarely saw her except in the evening. Sydney was the ruling mistress, and she and Thurston were together the livelong day. 'They are the happiest couple in the world,' Paul would say to

me sometimes, as we walked home from St. Helen's Towers. But he only said it that I might contradict.

'Not the happiest, Paul! Oh, my dear, my dear, not the happiest as long as you and I are together!'

We have been together, Paul and I, seven happy years, and during that time there have been wonderful changes in the old Vicarage. The new wing has been added; for there are three little ones in the nursery, over which Peace still presides.

Alas! the twins have been parted; for Cyril is now at Winchester, where his dear father had been educated; and though Stella was at first inconsolable, she soon found consolation in the society of her small brother and sister. Stella is my right hand; my dear, bright-faced, winsome little companion—'Mother Girlie' as she still calls me. She is perfectly devoted to my Philip, who is his father's image; but she fairly idolises our sweet Yvonne. The child can do no wrong in her eyes; but, indeed, she has the loveliest nature, and I am afraid we all spoil her dreadfully.

And then there is my baby, my bonnie Maurice—a splendid fellow, who nearly cost his mother her life. But neither Paul nor I ever care to dwell on that painful occurrence.

There was an accident. One of our horses was restive, and our coachman had lost control; a motor was passing. I do not know what happened. I believe I was thrown out, and that but for Paul's presence of mind I must have been killed; for the rear horse nearly kicked me—only Paul caught the bridle.

I was very ill after that, and at one time they despaired of my life; but God was good to us, and I was given back to them. What Paul must have

suffered ! But he never even spoke to me of those days ; I think he could not.

All those months father and mother never left Bayfield. Mother almost lived at the Vicarage. For some weeks I was not allowed to see my baby, and when at last the doctor gave permission, it was mother who laid him beside me. My Maurice ! my precious boy ! the tears that I shed on your innocent face that day were all from pure joy.

But here comes Mentor with his usual question : 'What ! writing still, Githa ? I thought the autobiography of your girlhood was to be finished to-day.'

'Yes, but I have only to add the closing words, Paul. Do you remember that to-morrow will be our wedding day, and that dear father and mother are to dine with us ?'

'Do I ever forget it, love ?' stroking my head. 'Little wife, I have some good news for you to-night. Dr. Neale tells me that you have made such progress during the last fortnight that he quite hopes that in a few weeks you will be as well as ever.'

'Oh, Paul, is it really true ? and I was afraid I might be an invalid for years.'

'I think we all feared that, dearest, but our merciful Father has decreed otherwise. Now Stella wants to know if the children are to come down as usual.'

'Yes, of course ; but wait one moment. Have I been very impatient, Paul ?'

'Impatient, darling ?' He was very close to me now, and I had my arms round his neck.

'I tried not to be ; but there were times when it was very hard, and I could not face the music. I did not want you to have an invalid wife, dear.'

‘Neither did I; but I should have loved her all the same. You would have been a spoiled woman, Githa, with all these hands and feet to wait on you.’

The happy tears dimmed my eyes. I had been afraid, and there was no cause for fear. I had been nerving myself to carry a cross which had not been laid upon me.

‘Will you take me into the church to-morrow, Paul?’ And then as our eyes met he understood. ‘Hark! I hear the little feet on the stairs; after all they have not waited to be summoned.’

‘You had better write Finis, soon,’ he said, smiling at me.

‘There—I have written it! Now, children’; and then they all trooped into the room.

THE END

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